ROCK ART ~~PAINTINGS~~ IN ZIMBABWE

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Thesis submitted for the Degree of Ph. D.
at the School of Oriental and African Studies,
University of London.
1992

VOLUME 1
(TEXT)

ABSTRACT

This work is based on the comparative iconographic analysis of a distinct corpus of paintings within the Later Stone Age, Bushman or San art of southern Africa. They are distinct from the rest of the paintings of the region in age, numbers, variety, complexity and density. It defines in detail the principles that determined the form of the paintings - where the primary concern was to depict objects through outline alone - and the canon - the very restricted range of subjects that were depicted. It demonstrates that the human imagery established a set of archetypes, expressing concepts of the roles of men and women in the community through a set of readily legible attributes. The art was thus in essence conceptual and, of its nature, not concerned with the individual, illustration, narrative, documentation or anecdote. Within this framework, the paintings focused on concepts of the various forms and degrees of supernatural energy or potency that all San have believed to be inherent in every person. Further studies demonstrate how large and dangerous animals, particularly the elephant, were conceived as symbols of potency and their hunting as a metaphor for trance. Compositions based on oval shapes and the dots within and emanating from them are shown to be further symbols of aspects of potency. Many recurrent and hitherto ignored motifs attached to human figures are shown to be a graphic commentary on the metaphysics of the archetypes.

The study is set in the context of the archaeology of the sub-region, recent studies of San concepts, perceptions and beliefs, a review of previous research, and a critique of influential recent South African work which first integrated paintings with San beliefs.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I have been helped in tracing by my family and many friends, especially Ann and Roger Martin, Sophie Golay-Lescuyer, Courtney Yilk, Sasha Wales-Smith, and Teresa, Francesca and Margaret Garlake, and also by Bettina Schmidt, Ray Brown, Anthony Chennells, Elaine Rivron, George Brooks, Barbara Murray and Keith Murray. All the drawings reproduced here are by me, with the exception of **Figs.1.2 and 1.3** for which Courtney Yilk did much of the retracing under my supervision. I am deeply indebted to Roger Martin for so much enthusiastic help in so many areas; Corona Thornycroft, who showed us many sites and gave us generous hospitality; Andre Proctor, who guided us to one of the greatest and then most inaccessible sites; the police who provided protection for this visit; Ron Gentile who gave us his hospitality in Bulawayo; Col. Lewis, then commanding the British Military Training Team at Nyanga who relocated another important cave and took us on the long walk to it; and to Keith and Cavell Taute for their hospitality on this occasion. All but two of the many farmers we visited, usually unexpectedly and often inconveniently and to whom we were usually complete strangers, nevertheless gave us their time, information, help and hospitality with great and unhesitating generosity. Many people living near paintings - especially many farmers, teachers and agricultural extension workers - were graciously tolerant of our intrusions and helped us find paintings and get our equipment to them. Justin Gwanzura, of Robert Anderson Pvt. Ltd of Harare, photographed my tracings for me, with patience and skill. I am extremely grateful to them all.

Anthony Chennells read and commented on part of an early draft of the manuscript. Margaret Garlake commented on several successive drafts and her proof reading of the final version, a particularly gruesome task, was of great help. John Picton's careful, detailed, trenchant and wide-ranging criticisms forced me to rethink a great deal of the material

and have had a considerable impact on the final results. Without Ann Martin's early and constant encouragement and help in every way, not least her inimitable criticisms in the field, the project would neither have been born nor survived childhood; her continued interest, now at a distance, remains a goad. I thus owe a great many people deep debts of gratitude.

I neither asked for nor received any financial help from anyone for any aspect of this research. I did however benefit from an invitation, through Prof. George Brooks, to visit the University of Indiana to deliver the Hans Wolff Memorial Lecture of 1987, and from the help given me by Profs. Allen Roberts and Bill Dewey and the University of Iowa to enable me to attend the Triennial Symposium of the Arts Council of the African Studies Association at the University of Iowa in 1992. Both occasions allowed me to get to know a little more of studies in the history of African art from an American perspective: for which I am again most grateful, as I am for the hospitality of Bill and Barbara Dewey in Iowa City. In 1985, the University of Zimbabwe prohibited me from using the University Library, normally accessible to bona fide researchers. At the same time, the Director of the Queen Victoria Memorial Museum in Harare, Mrs. Stella Nduku, the notorious obstacle to so much potential research into the prehistory of Zimbabwe, withdrew my previous borrowing privileges from the Museum library, whose collection I had helped build in the 1960's. Though many of her former and present staff nevertheless continued to assist me as far as they could and for which I thank them, others followed her lead and did not. In marked contrast, the staff of the National Archives of Zimbabwe were all, as always, as helpful as anyone could wish. So were Prof. E. Haberland and Dr. K.H. Striedter, who facilitated my access to Frobenius material on a brief and, yet again, unannounced visit to the Frobenius-Institut, Frankfurt-am-Main.

PREFACE AND APOLOGIA

This work is an attempt to deal with almost every aspect of over 12 000 prehistoric painted sites spread over an entire large and distinct geographic region: the granite highveld between the Zambezi and Limpopo Rivers. I try to discover, demonstrate and define the nature, character and aesthetic principles, conventions and canon of the imagery. In describing the visible features of form and style, one is led towards some understanding of the perceptions, conceptions and concerns of the artists and their societies, something of the significance of the imagery. On some aspects of the paintings, I have done no work myself - for instance on archaeological dating or compositions of pigments or media - but present a synopsis and critique of the work of others in these fields. Some aspects of the paintings have concerned me little at this stage: stylistic change and regional variation amongst them, partly because they are so subtle and difficult to discern that they demand a study at least as large as this again and also demand a larger body of data for analysis than I have been able to provide.

Many will consider the project over ambitious. However, the decision to attempt it was deliberately taken as a first stage in the serious discussion of the art. I find previous work in Zimbabwe lacking in any real engagement with the material, misconceived, inappropriate and derivative, and the product of prejudices that distort and diminish the artists and subject. This must be dealt with and this can be done satisfactorily only if the art is considered as a whole. Work on a broad scale is an essential preliminary to later, narrower and more penetrating studies.

There were further reasons for working this broadly. If detailed studies were to be attempted at this early stage, without establishing some prior understanding of the paintings as a whole, such studies would exist in a vacuum

and it would be impossible to assess their worth or significance in relationship to the entire corpus of material. This, I feel, is a weakness in some of the most worthwhile and convincing recent studies of paintings in South Africa. The pioneers of new interpretations of the art there, David Lewis-Williams and his student and colleague, Thomas Dowson, have a narrower focus than mine, leaving one with only an uncertain understanding of the validity or significance of their studies to the art as a whole.

While my work is stimulated and strongly influenced by theirs, I am not satisfied that their approaches, interpretations or conclusions are applicable <u>in toto</u> to the very different material in Zimbabwe, which it seems may be significantly older, more abundant, more varied, more densely layered and more allusively wider-ranging and complex than the material they have studied. I therefore try to locate their insights within the entire corpus of this distinct and hitherto unconsidered body of paintings. My work becomes in part a test of theirs, against a broader spectrum of paintings of a different space and time. Such a test would carry little conviction if one did not investigate as many aspects of the Zimbabwe paintings as possible.

I am convinced that one can only approach any study of the Zimbabwe paintings through a primary, detailed, prolonged and concentrated study of the paintings themselves, a comparative, analytical study of iconography. I am further convinced that this in turn can only be achieved by making complete, detailed and accurate tracings of paintings.[1] This not only recovers and preserves a mass of significant detail, lost or generally overlooked by working through even the most technically accomplished photographs;[2] equally importantly, it also forces one, from the start, into prolonged concentration on the imagery itself, a lengthy process of ratiocination in the immediate and close presence of one's subject, the image itself.[3] All interpretative work attempted here derives from my tracings, reproduced here with an inevitable loss of quality, if only because of the considerable reduction that is necessary if they are to fit

the format of a thesis. But at least this means that my evidence is all made apparent and available.

The process of gathering material is slow, expensive and arduous. Consequently my work is based on a proportionately small body of material. I have visited, catalogued and made a complete photographic record of only 222 sites. However, these include about 90% of the major sites and probably about 10-20% of other important sites, if only 1% or less of the minor sites.[4] Tracings of paintings reproduced here include, on a conservative count, over 2400 separate images from 84 different sites. This number is comparable to those recorded in the four major South African surveys.[5] However, my material is selected: the 'subjective selection' that is anathema to those who still believe that 'objective scientific research' is attainable in the humanities. However, given the abundance of the material, some process of selection was inevitable: the number of images presented here is already far more than can be individually or exhaustively analysed. I selected paintings that appeared to me to be relevant to my aims. This process of selection was continually changing and developing as the research proceeded. Unless you are continually assessing the relevance of the material you accumulate to your aims, a great deal of effort is duplicated or wasted. I placed more emphasis on the human imagery than on the animal because the former is more directly amenable to interpretation. I also deliberately tried to select images for reproduction that tended to weaken rather than support my arguments. I believe that my choices of paintings for intensive study are a valid representative sample of the art as a whole.[6]

Nevertheless some will insist that my sample is inadequate. One can respond that the imagery is repetitive in the sense of a subject matter of limited range.[7] Be this as it may, the purpose of this thesis is to formulate certain basic hypotheses about this art, precise propositions for future testing against larger samples, and no more. This is not a worthless task. It is the absence of the careful formulation of hypotheses and collection of material to test

and demonstrate these, and the reliance, instead, on nebulous generalizations, that negates so much previous work. Nevertheless, given the size of the field relative to the size of my sample, any interpretations offered here can and should only be regarded as tentative.[8]

In South Africa between about 1965 and 1975, the search for 'objectivity' led to projects based on statistical analyses of the attributes of large samples of paintings recorded systematically within defined areas. This was and may still be considered by some a prerequisite for any valid interpretative work. It now seems clear to me - and others - that this approach has proved a failure, if only because the attributes assumed to be significant were arbitrarily selected. It is no longer pursued even by those who were among its leading exponents and who achieved some of the very few worthwhile results from it.[9] A careful comparative reading of their subsequent works shows that their interpretations like mine are now constructed around a relatively few of what they consider key paintings. I would therefore argue that my sample is no different from or less adequate than those that have formed the basis of the most important recent studies of paintings in South Africa. The success of narrow selective foci is a consequence of the nature of the art and of our relationship to it. We are dealing with the products of a culture very distant from our own in every way, and one almost entirely destroyed before any adequate investigations of it were made. We will only begin to penetrate its surviving artistic production through painstaking analyses of what seem to be 'Rosetta Stones', rather than through collecting and counting elements of thousands of incomprehensible 'Cuneiform tablets'.

Paintings are extremely vulnerable to human damage and, in Zimbabwe, are for all practical purposes unprotected. Visitors to paintings can disrupt the lives of owners of the land on which they lie and of people living near them and in extreme cases this can result in their destruction by those so disturbed. Many landowners have asked me not to reveal the locations of paintings on their properties and I have

copies of this work available to the public. This should not handicap those who might consult it. It was not one of my intentions to discuss regional variations in the paintings and it would be inappropriate for anyone to seek to use my material for this. However, the precise locations of all paintings reproduced here are recorded and will be made available to any responsible researcher who requires them and is prepared to observe the same confidentiality.

NOTES

1. My recording and tracing methods are described in the Appendix.

2. As examples of how much is overlooked or misinterpreted in studies based on photographs, compare two tracings from such photographs, Figs.D37 and D11 in Lee and Woodhouse, 1970, with Pl.40 in Goodall, 1959, and Fig.12.4 in this work, both direct tracings from the same paintings. The differences are astonishing - and Woodhouse claims to have among the best sets of photographs of paintings in southern Africa and is acknowledged by many as the leading authority on the art.

3. Similar recording has been practised with the greatest skill in the Drakensberg of Natal and Brandberg of Namibia by two South African researchers, Vinnicombe and Pager.

4. Definitions of major, important and minor sites; an estimate of the number of painted sites in Zimbabwe; and details of the sites I have recorded and how they were selected are given in the Appendix.

5. Pager, 1973a; Vinnicombe, 1976; Lewis-Williams, 1972 and 1974. These are discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

6. Throughout this work phrases like "frequent", "recurrent", "general", "rare" or "unusual" recur. These judgments cannot be substantiated with any numerical analyses and are open to the same criticisms as those that can be applied to my sample as a whole. Again, the only justification I can offer is that I believe they rest on sufficiently wide familiarity and sufficiently close comparative study of the paintings to have some credibility.

7. Vinnicombe recognized this in Drakensberg paintings: Vinnicombe, 1976: 349, 350. Others have confirmed her views.

8. Problems of selection, of sampling methods and of the reliability of inferences drawn from restricted samples, is a perennial one in archaeological investigations. Archaeologists, particularly in parts of the world like Africa where the logistics are so difficult, resources so

scarce and investigators so few and so isolated, tend to base their interpretations on the excavation of very small areas of a very small number of sites - both proportionately far smaller than those I have examined or use here. Yet, for better or worse, inferences from them are widely and unquestioningly accepted. In southern and eastern Africa, for example, tiny samples of material- in one widely accepted instance on no more than 30 potsherds - form the bases for the most grandiose theories of Bantu origins and migrations. (for one critique of this see Garlake, 1982). In some sense, this thesis is an archaeological project: the sites are remote and the recovery of material for analysis from them - i.e. tracing - is not dissimilar from excavation and almost as arduous and expensive. I believe the propositions that I present here are a great deal less grandiose and more firmly based on a great deal more material than many generally accepted archaeological interpretations.

9. Compare Lewis-Williams 1972 and 1974 with all his subsequent work.

1. INTRODUCTION

Three sets of paintings

To set the scene of this study, I shall attempt to give straightforward descriptions of what is immediately recognizable in the paintings at three sites. **Fig.1.1** reproduces paintings in one of the larger granite caves in Mashonaland. It is dominated by two very large creatures facing each other: the white outline of an elephant on the left, part of its head twisted towards the viewer so that both its white tusks are visible, and on the right, a larger and much more shapeless beast with two disproportionately short legs and thin horns outlined in a dark pigment and the body filled with smears of a bright orange pigment. All along the top are large paintings of the same species of antelope, some standing and others lying, all by the same artist and in the same pigment but each separate and distinct so they can scarcely be considered a herd. Their narrow pointed ears, long faces, pronounced withers and sloping backs identify them as tsessebe and their lack of horns as cows. Three on the left have all but disappeared, for their whole surface has been systematically hammered away: probably comparatively recent vandalism to remove the pigment for use as medicine. Close examination shows that several have three pairs of straight, parallel white lines drawn across their necks like collars or necklaces, a strange and unnatural device. Beside and below them are small young antelope, with distinctive lop ears lying almost horizontally: these are tsessebe calves; there are more of them in the panel. There are only two male tsessebe: one lying under the elephant's tusks and the other in front of the bovid's head, turning to bite its back. Other animals include, on the extreme left, a white leopard, superimposed late in the sequence on the elephant's tail; a grubbing warthog below it and another standing close by; a large yellow and white kudu cow; and some distance below the bovid's head, a strange stiff little elephant, with only one front and one back leg.

There are scores of individual human figures across the

panel. It is impossible to assign most of them to groups or scenes and very few have any equipment or weapons or are engaged in any specific or obvious activities. However, at the extreme left, four separate hunters with their bows and arrows can be distinguished, the lowest one running fast - the image that first springs to mind whenever anyone thinks of San paintings. There is only one other hunter in the entire panel.

At the bottom centre there is a party of five women with aprons, bags tied to their backs and holding long sticks; the front one is almost entirely obscured by a later painting and the last leads by the hand a small child who also has a stick. At the far left, there is a group of two other women with a child between them, who reaches up to the breasts of one of them. Now that groups gradually become distinguishable, it seems that many are families of father, mother and a single child: the most elegant is top centre, but there is another on the elephant's neck and another in a light pigment just above the small elephant. Many figures are sitting, kneeling or reclining; one man is lying forward with his head on a seated woman's lap. Repeated gestures can also be discerned: many of the figures on or very near the elephant seem to lift one hand or occasionally both and hold their necks or heads.

The only plant represented is a spray of thin leaves at the bottom centre. Around it are three figures; the largest - and the largest human figure in the panel - is a hunter who seems to be falling forward; the arrow he holds, and one in the bundle beside him, have triangular heads. Next to him, a figure lies on its back, holding its head and its legs bent tight up against the body. Below the spray, there is the figure of a man bending forward that has never been completed, for it has no head or arms. There is another like it just in front of two recumbent tsessebe at the top centre. Finally, at the extreme bottom right corner, there is a pair of strange little figures with small stick-like arms and legs, bent and spread wide and symmetrically, and great round bloated bodies.

All the paintings of people seem to be stylised in the same way, with very long necks and heads reduced to a simple horizontal oval shape; their bodies are elongated but their legs are much more carefully shaped. Only the largest hunter seems to have been given more form and detail.

All along the bottom, are strange and colourful designs that seem to be completely unidentifiable: simple sausage shapes in different colours grouped together and bent round each other in compact compositions, some of them partially covered in lines of dots; one of the smaller groups seems to surround and hold the bovid's foreleg. Beside one of these designs in the centre - a pink sausage with pointed ends and segmented by dark lines - curving over and round the party of gatherers, is a small white blob. Coming out of this are three parallel white lines. These zig-zag across the whole centre of the panel, disappear under the bovid, though fragments are visible through it, to reappear and end near its tail.

The second site

Fig.1.2 records the paintings flanking and within a small, low cave high on a granite scarp. On the left side of the rock face, where it steps back to form the entrance to the cave, animals are dominant. At the top a badly exfoliated lion stands over a tsessebe, upside down with legs limp and neck extended in death: probably one of the extremely rare scenes of an animal kill. A large striped zebra is painted over a line of four antelope, a bull and three or four cows; to judge by their heavy necks and the hair of the male's dewlap, they may be waterbuck. Three small buck below them are duiker, two cows and a bull with short upright horns: female duiker are probably one of the commonest animals in the paintings but a horned male is extremely seldom depicted. The one female is upside down but otherwise its stable and alert stance is that of a live animal and it shares none of the diagnostic features of death found in the upside down tsessebe at the top. There is an immature tsessebe bull on the left and a calf of the same species below the duiker. At the bottom are grouped three more duiker.

On their right is a woman sitting with a child standing beside her and reaching up open-mouthed to feed at a breast. Beside them are a bow, quiver and hunting bag with shoulder sling and whisk. Two hunters are painted in white beside the central duiker; and another tiny hunter under the immature tsessebe bull. The line of six figures, on which the larger animals are superimposed, carry the arrows of hunters.

Curving to the right of this panel and into the cave, is the white outline of an elephant. In front of it and part of the same composition is a line of five hunters. Those at the front, back and second from the back have bows and arrows. The front four each have two or three spears; in each case at least one has a large open triangular head with a barb or barbs below it. They are approaching and attacking a second elephant, its white pigment now fragmentary. Beneath it a sixth hunter crouches and thrusts a similar spear at its hind legs. A large kudu bull has been painted over this and a giraffe over the trunk of the rear elephant.

Moving further right are a zebra, a spotted leopard, two carnivores, perhaps jackals, a tiny long-tailed carnivore and a feline, probably a lioness: an unusual accumulation of such creatures, by different artists. To the right is a line of 10 seated women, their bodies decorated with white stripes, all that remains of most of them. Below the carnivores is a line of eight men, 'stick figures', some wearing tails, tassels, capes and with their arms raised. Below them is a line of 12 men, some with capes, striped with white and two waving a short rod or rods. At the bottom is a line of seven more men, three with raised arms and one with lines from his armpits which may indicate a cape. All their bodies curve back yet they lean so far forward that they seem weightless; four figures below them, two possibly with capes, may be part of their group.

In the centre of these paintings is a line of three complete and one or two partial circles with large dots leading through them. An incomplete figure in the same pigment, without arms or feet and a much reduced head, bends down to enter the first circle. Across this part of the

paintings are some larger figures, one holding its head, another its neck and an attenuated and elongated figure. There is also a line of gatherers carrying bags on their backs, one very large. Save for a large kudu bull, the ten or so antelope are not identifiable: the most vivid turns sharply backwards to bite its withers: a posture seen also in a tsessebe bull in **Fig.1.1.**

At the far right is the most complex and striking image of all, **Fig.1.3:** a large composition of oval shapes, probably the cumulative result of successive artists' work. The centre is six ovals in two colours, the darker covered in dots. Much larger and more strongly curved ovals, four at the bottom and two at the top partly surround them and give the design an overall circular shape; white dots cap them and fill the circle. A cluster of three vivid ovals breaks the circle at the top left. Although this huge composition is painted to one side of the rest of the paintings, it dominates the cave much as the large elephant and heavy bovid dominate and unify **Fig.1.1.**

The third site

The third set of paintings is typical, if such a word is appropriate to such a diverse corpus of art, of a minor site. It is on a large boulder at the foot of a great, bare granite hill. The boulder, one of many, must in the distant past have split away from the parent mass, rolled down the hill and lodged at its foot. It is now on level, seasonally swampy land at the head of a small stream fed by the run-off from the hill. The inward-sloping eastern face of the boulder gives the paintings some protection but offers little in the way of shelter to anyone seeking to camp beside it: no more than shade for much of the day and some relief from showers and breezes. After it came to rest, part of the underside of the boulder split away and exposed new, fresh, unweathered rock surfaces just sufficiently set back to prevent rainwater running across their surfaces; there are two main panels of paintings on these: one facing east and one at right angles to it, facing south.

The south-facing panel, **Fig.1.4**, is about 2m by 2m

across and 1.5m above the ground: the paintings below that have been destroyed by fire and abrasion. At the top is an isolated, tight-knit group of 13 men, shown in detail in **Fig.9.14 below**, painted in some detail by an expert artist: three of them are now reduced to partial outlines for the paint within their outlines has flaked away, a not uncommon phenomenon that is a product of the painting technique. The figures all slope to the right at an angle of more than 45*, an unintended and unconscious consequence of the angle at which the artist was standing when he painted them: verticality was never of much consequence in the art, especially in paintings on horizontal surfaces like the roofs of overhangs or caves. The men are clearly almost all hunters: six hold bows and bundles of arrows, two others each hold a single arrow and there are three groups of equipment - bows, arrows, bags containing further arrows and fly whisks - lying amongst them; three have similar bags hanging from one shoulder. A hunter at the bottom holds a leaf-shaped object as well as his weapons. Five men on the outskirts have no weapons and two of these raise both arms wide and high. A later artist has added two more figures at the top of the group: short, stocky and without any equipment, they seem to be children; both of them have dots painted on their biceps. Eight of the main figures, as well as the two later figures, have crests attached to the tops of their heads: tufts or lines diverging from a single point on the crown. These figures do not seem to be doing anything; most of them walk sedately towards the right but two walk in the opposite direction, so there is no sense of direction or unified purpose or movement.

Just overlapping this group is a large design painted in two colours and considerable detail. It consists of seven oval shapes in a dark ochre, lying on their sides and nested together; two run into each other; the bottom three are slightly curved. They are all outlined in dark red and a line in the same paint encloses the left end. Lines of dark red dots fill much of the space within the enclosure and similar lines of dots cap the other ends of the rectangles.

The interstices between the rectangles were filled with short vertical strokes and these extend a short way from the right end as lattices or ladders of lines.

Below the hunters is a group of six dark fish outlined in white; there are clearly two different species, one long and thin with a sharp pointed nose and the other with a wide body and fins; as is usual, the exact species are not identifiable. Above them, three creatures have been sketched so inexpertly that one can only say they are tailed quadrupeds that might be monkeys. The fish are superimposed on the remnants of a white giraffe outlined in red: most of its forequarters, neck and head have disappeared. Behind it is a figure with large pointed ears rising from its head. Below it is a running figure deliberately left without arms or head. The leg of another deliberately incomplete human is between the giraffe and fish. Below the giraffe is a clear image of a zebra, distinguishable by its stiff mane, up its neck and between its ears. Its head is lowered and lines come from its muzzle and collect in what seems to be a pool of liquid. Behind it and too far away from it for any association between the two images to be certain, a single hunter with an arrow in his bow, raised and ready to draw, aims towards it. Almost touching one of the zebra's ears stands a man with a conical crest, holding a stick; almost certainly he was painted by another artist and is not in any realistic or scenic relationship with the zebra. On the right of him is a line of four unarmed men, making different gestures with their arms; two have vertical lines drawn across their penises; it seems quite impossible to say what they might be doing. Above them is a small young rhinoceros, its horns just beginning to be visible. At their head is another rhino, a three-pronged motif painted over its back. There are at least two more rhino in the panel. A yellow one is painted over a sable in the bottom left corner, with only its ears, horn and line of its back, belly and chest now distinguishable. A small animal just in front of it could be a hippo or rhino calf: the former seems more probable. At the bottom centre and the latest in a sequence of paintings

here, is a rhino pierced with arrows in its neck, belly, shoulder and hind leg. Its rump is painted over one of the very few women in the panel; her rear apron and one breast are clear but she is another isolated figure whose purpose, relationship or significance is entirely obscure.

The bottom of the panel is a palimpsest of superimposed paintings. The earliest seem to have been two dark zebra, their stripes outlined and detailed in white. Over them is an extended line of five small hornless antelope extending almost across the whole bottom of the panel. Perhaps they are female impala but this animal was so rarely if ever painted that it seems better to see them as deliberately generalised images of young or female antelope. Overlapping them were painted not only the wounded rhino but two detailed hunters. The one on the left kneels, raises his bow armed with an arrow and prepares to draw; this arrow has a large flight and a head crossed by a perpendicular barb, unlike the four arrows in his hand which have similar flights but no distinct heads; again he has a crest of diverging lines on his head and also lines apparently tied round his waist and one knee. The hunter in front of him runs towards him, holding two arrows in one hand and his bow armed with another arrow in the other. This arrow is once more barbed; he too has short lines coming from his waist or stomach. These two hunters are by the same artist but scarcely form a coherent scene. It cannot be claimed that the hunter about to shoot is aiming at the small buck, the other hunter or the rhino: the distances are wrong.

Below these figures is a jumble of small human figures, painted so sketchily, formlessly and incompetently that nothing useful can be said about them: such figures are frequently, even generally found at the edges of a panel of paintings. They certainly belong within the same artistic tradition but seem and may well be the imitative work of children just beginning to develop their painterly skills. The same might be said of at least three small, thin-limbed, 'stick' figures painted amongst the images in the middle of the panel but they are much more alive, expressive and

assured. The bottom of the panel is also covered with slightly curved horizontal lines outlining broad areas of paint: a sequence of at least four superimposed designs like this can be distinguished on the left. At the extreme left, above these designs and below the hunter who seems to aim towards the zebra, is another shape: elongate, curved, with a wide and hollow centre, and tufted or tailed at one end.

At the extreme right of the panel are the remains of an antelope painted upside down. An aproned figure with long lines flowing from her armpits holds her head in both hands. A small circle of lines enhaloes her head; a similar circular design is painted to the left. These are painted over the remains of another early zebra and a rectangular shape with its corners drawn out so that it seems to represent the skin of an animal. This single panel contains much of the imagery we shall seek to analyse: the wounded rhino, the bleeding zebra, the hunter, his large barbed arrowheads, the barred penis, the crested head, the incomplete human, the upside-down animal, and the non-figurative patterns and designs.

Many features of these paintings are immediately striking; foremost is the extraordinary richness and variety of scene and colour. The artists' palette was obviously entirely restricted to earth colours but the paintings as a whole still give the impression of a medley of tone and colour. The artists were clearly masters of their medium: nowhere are there any signs of hesitancy, mistakes or alterations in their lines or of the blurring, smearing or spilling of paint. When they are looked at more carefully, it becomes apparent that most of the images can scarcely be called realistic and many have been grossly and deliberately distorted but never at the expense of liveliness: every image carries complete conviction of its naturalism. There is enormous variety in the subjects: humans in many different attitudes and groups, animals of almost every species and colourful geometric forms of great richness and complexity.

The arrangement of the images is extremely dense; they are all intertwined, juxtaposed and superimposed but they never lose their individual completeness: each remains

discrete and isolated though it is repeated many times. We begin to realise that life can never have been like this: disparate creatures jumbled together in associations that never occur in nature, with people all around and between them. There is movement everywhere: some people and animals are indeed static, even recumbent, yet all are taut, tense, alive, vibrant with energy. Yet none is really doing anything specific and it is generally difficult to say why any person or animal has adopted any particular posture; it seems impossible to discern motive or narrative in the characters. Whatever is happening, whatever is commemorated, is so obscure that it all seems incomprehensible.

What are we to make of all this? It seems such a bewildering jumble of disjointed images. Nothing tells us any story or illustrates a scene of any complexity. The nearest we come to this are the party of gatherers and the families but these scarcely seem to record particular events. And so much is unnatural: from the mixing of humans and animals and their bodily proportions to necklaces on animals. Is it just a meaningless, fortuitous mess or is it the result of a coherent system, whose motifs, relationships, juxtapositions and superpositions have significance? It is the purpose of this work to explore these problems.

2. DATING THE PAINTINGS: THE PREHISTORY OF ZIMBABWE

The archaeology of Zimbabwe

At present there is no means of dating any rock paintings directly. Dating methods based on the decay of radioactive isotopes can, for recent geological periods, only be applied to organic materials. All the pigments used lack any organic component except for rare black pigments which may contain charcoal: no samples from them have been collected or analysed.

Archaeological deposits can give no direct indication of the age of the paintings on the cave walls. There is no direct association between any archaeological deposit and a painting on a wall. No paintings have been found covered by any archaeological deposit, dated or undated. No painted cave or recess has been found to which access was subsequently blocked, whether by deposits containing dateable material or not. There is no indication that any small portable objects were ever painted and none has ever been found either in an archaeological deposit or elsewhere. Painted areas vary so greatly in their height above the ground that none can be related to any former living surfaces.

The dated sequence of Stone Age industries does however provide some sort of cultural and chronological framework within which the paintings must, in broad terms, be set. Within this sequence, attempts have been made to establish firmer and more precise indications of the dates of the paintings. At present, the best indications of date come from artists' materials and painted fragments of their work that have been found in archaeological deposits. Pigments used in the paintings; the small pieces of stone that were used as palettes for paint and that still bear areas of paint; and spalls bearing vestiges of paintings that have exfoliated from the walls of painted caves have been recovered from stratified archaeological deposits.[1] These deposits cover an extremely wide time range.

The archaeology of the earlier periods of Zimbabwean

prehistory has placed a heavy and almost exclusive emphasis on defining and classifying the technology, forms and relative proportions of stone tools and, from these, constructing and defining a dated typological sequence. A generation ago this process seemed, to its exponents, to have reached a considerable degree of certainty and precision, with many detailed variations defined within each industry.[2] All this is now viewed with considerable scepticism and seen as much less reliable or certain.[3] The subjectivity of the categories employed, the paucity of firm data, the imprecision of stratigraphy, contexts and associations of the tools and the crudeness of the earlier analyses are now recognized.

More recent interpretations of Stone Age typology are much more tentative and cautious, recognising the extent of variability that is present within the original classifications, variations that reflect the multiplicity of human responses encoded in a tool kit, varying with the local ecology, with the seasons, with the nature of the occupation of the site, and with the many and varied human activities that took place within it. Recent studies are concerned, for example, with the structure of occupation deposits;[4] with the particular nature of different sorts of sites; with the distinctions between the activities within a large cave, a small shelter or an unprotected hunting camp; and with the mobility and seasonal aggregations and dispersals of groups. There has also been a shift away from studies of typological sequences to investigating more real and exciting problems of social responses to particular ecological opportunities.[5] It is in this sort of research that the study of the paintings ideally will one day be set.

The Middle Stone Age

The Stone Age sequence of Zimbabwe has been established through the excavation of deep, stratified archaeological deposits in a few of the largest painted caves in the Matopo Hills.[6] Deposits at the base of the excavated sequences in the Bambata and Pomongwe Caves contained what is defined as the 'Charama Industry': at Pomongwe, these deposits were

almost 2m deep. This, the earliest Middle Stone Age industry, included large handaxes and cleavers, rough pebble tools and rounded stone balls, probably made to be thrown as missiles. They are all more characteristic of the Early Stone Age industries of open sites and river gravels of Zimbabwe and are seldom found in caves. There were also points and scrapers of various forms made on flakes and the prepared cores from which they were struck. No worked bone has been found in Charama deposits. The industry is beyond the range of radiocarbon dating but is probably more than 125 000 years old.

Pieces of pigment in the various earth colours of reds, browns and yellows, striated through rubbing on a rough surface, perhaps in the process of grinding or being used as crayons to draw on the cave walls, have been found in Charama levels at Bambata and Pomongwe. This evidence of at least some sort of decorative activity so long ago is not firm evidence that people were painting on the rock surfaces at this date.

Stratified above this early material in even thicker deposits were a series of levels - 4m deep at Nswatugi Cave - containing material of the fully developed Middle Stone Age and named the 'Bambata Industry' after the cave. All of it is certainly more than 35 000 years old and probably more than 40 000 years old. It is most clearly defined by small triangular stone points, seldom more than 5cm long, made on flakes and retouched round the edges and often across one or both faces. Generally supposed to have been used to tip spears, these points are remarkably small and light for such a purpose and may rather have formed the heads of the first arrows, a weapon that is usually identified with the Later Stone Age.

The climate was significantly cooler and drier than during Later Stone Age or historic times, resulting in a more open grassland vegetation, favouring the larger herd animals and making their hunting easier. The main game hunted were large antelope, most of them of the same species that exist today.[7]

Fragments of pigment have been found in the Middle Stone Age deposits of every excavated cave. Middle Stone Age deposits more than 40 000 years old, excavated at Nswatugi Cave in 1975, contained a piece of granite stained with red paint that had certainly been used as a palette and two others that had also probably formed palettes. Late Middle Stone Age deposits at Pomongwe contained two pieces of granite with patches of paint on them that looked more like fragments of intentional paintings than the remains of paint on palettes.[8]

Abandonment

At Pomongwe, the Middle and Later Stone Age deposits are separated by a sterile layer of granite spalls, fallen from the surfaces of the cave walls and roofs. This deposit may mark a long period when the caves were not used by people or a phase of very active degradation and exfoliation of the rock surfaces, which may have started as early as 40 000 B.P. or as late as 25 000 B.P. and lasted to about 21 000 B.P. or as late as 16 000 B.P. At Nswatugi and Bambata, stony and sterile layers again separate the Middle and Later Stone Age levels and date to between 10 000 and 8 000 B.P. Many assume that no paintings can have survived from before these events.

The Later Stone Age

Later Stone Age deposits in the larger caves are confined to layers and lenses of almost pure ash in the uppermost levels of the caves. They are seldom as thick as the underlying deposits. At Nswatugi the deposits were 1m thick but at Bambata they were only 50-90cm thick and even less at Pomongwe.

The Later Stone Age is distinguished from the Middle Stone Age by the presence of small parallel sided blades or bladelets, struck from cores with a punch capable of precise control. The blades were then retouched, 'backed' or blunted round all but the cutting edge itself, to make holding and hafting easier and producing regular geometric shapes such as crescents, lunates and trapezoids and thumbnail, circular and notched scrapers. These are known generically as microliths.

Blade production and backing retouch had their origins

in Middle Stone Age industries. It was claimed early that at Bambata there were levels intercalated in the main body of Middle Stone Age material showing a concentration on the manufacture of blades. Taking the European Palaeolithic sequence as having a universal validity, these levels were interpreted as representing the work of the earliest true man, Homo sapiens sapiens, the creator of the 'blade cultures' of Europe, intruding for the first time into an area hitherto inhabited by Homo sapiens neanderthalensis, maker of 'Mousterian' tools in Europe, of which the Bambata Middle Stone Age material was considered the local equivalent.[9]

The first of the Later Stone Age industries, 'Tshangula', named after another Matopos cave, started at least 16 000 years ago and lasted to the end of the Pleistocene Period, 11 000 years ago. It was originally considered a 'decadent' technology with large, rough tools and none of the well-made Middle Stone Age points or scrapers.[10] Nevertheless the debris from stone tool manufacture looked as if it was the result of making small tools of the more developed industries of the Later Stone Age. The Tshangula Industry is now felt to be a particularly ill-defined concept, covering at least two distinct industries.[11] The earlier is the more nondescript, dominated by scrapers and with practically no tools with blunting retouch to their non-cutting edges. The later industry contains small retouched blades and geometric forms more closely resembling the succeeding Later Stone Age 'Khami Industry'.

The 'Pomongwe Industry' was first recognized at Pomongwe Cave in the Matopos. It represents a distinct change in stone tool manufacture in the south-west of Zimbabwe between the Tshangula Industry and the succeeding Khami Industry. Flaking technology was comparatively crude. Parent cores were roughly formed and not prepared to ensure the production of regular thin flakes or blades. The tools are dominated by small circular scrapers and the assemblages are remarkable for the complete absence of backed blades. It is dated

between about 10 000 and 7 500 B.P.

The 'Khami Industry' began, where the Pomongwe Industry is absent, by 13 000 B.P. and lasted into the Christian era. At present it is seen as a single homogeneous entity based on small backed blades and microliths, with little indication of temporal changes or regional variations. In the deeper stratified deposits, some changes in the relative proportions of the tools has been detected, with an emphasis on backed tools increasing at the expense of scrapers.[12]

The Later Stone Age is considered to be marked above all by reliance, for hunting, on the bow and arrows with detachable heads, barbed down the sides with a series of microliths: the blunted backs of the microliths would have been held in the head by gum or mastic with their sharp cutting edges protruding. Interpretation has gone further and assumed that such weapons were so light that they must have relied on poison for their effectiveness and that therefore the weapons and hunting practices must have been closely similar to those of San in recent times.

The wide range of scrapers of a variety of standardised shapes are so small that they all must also have been hafted in the ends of wooden handles. Each was presumably designed for specific wood- and leather-working activities: preparing bows, arrows, spears and digging sticks; preparing material for windbreaks and shelters; cleaning hides and making leather aprons, capes, blankets and bags; and cutting and boring through bone.

In all the developments and regional specializations within the Later Stone Age - the Tshangula, Pomongwe and Khami Industries - bone was worked into awls, needles, points for arrows and linkshafts connecting the arrow head with its shaft. Ostrich egg shells were used to make beads: small discs drilled through the middle by stone borers and then strung together and their edges rubbed in a groove in an abrasive stone to reduce them to a smooth, rounded shape.

Stone pounders and shallow grooved mortars show that the preparation of vegetable foods took place. Straight wooden sticks, probably with fire-hardened ends, were used to grub

for edible roots and to dig rodents and reptiles from their burrows. These sticks may have been given weight and made more efficient by wedging onto the butt of the stick a stone that had been ground to a spherical shape and bored through the centre - a rare but characteristic component of Later Stone Age assemblages.

The main meat diet of the Later Stone Age came from the smaller solitary antelope like the duiker, hyrax - which still live in such numbers on the rocky hills where the paintings are found - hares, birds and reptiles like tortoises and lizards. We know little of the plant foods, although marula nuts were then, as now, a very popular food.

Later Stone Age deposits contain much evidence of painting. There are striated lumps of pigment in every colour; palettes; grindstones with traces of pigments in their striations - showing they had been used to grind pigment; and beads bearing traces of paint. Walker recovered 24 granite spalls bearing clear traces of paint from the Later Stone Age deposits at Pomongwe, dating to between about 4 000 and 9 000 B.P. Below these, in a level formed after 12 000 B.P., there were another three granite spalls with definite traces of paint. At two smaller painted sites also excavated by Walker, one, the Cave of Bees, had deposits from a Later Stone Age occupation that had lasted from at least 13 000 B.P. to 10 500 B.P. and which incorporated 16 painted spalls and a further 17 that had probably also had paintings on them. At Shashabugwa Shelter, the Later Stone Age deposits, formed between 9 000 and 7 500 years ago, contained 33 spalls bearing certain evidence of painting and another six that may have had paint on them.[13]

This is all clear evidence that throughout the Later Stone Age, certainly from about 13 000 B.P. to 5 000 B.P., the caves and shelters of the Matopo Hills had paintings on their walls. It does not however give any indication of what these paintings looked like or whether they had any resemblance or relationship to the paintings that survive today. It also does not establish how long the paintings

from which the spalls came may have existed before the spalls fell or indeed if the paintings predated the Later Stone Age.

A great many of the painted shelters and indeed many other protected shelters amongst the granite hills throughout Zimbabwe have Later Stone Age material exposed on the surface. Often great quantities of such debris is exposed along the drip line of larger shelters where rain runoff has eroded the upper occupation deposits. Of the 350 Later Stone Age Matopos sites that Walker investigated, 180 had paintings. He recognized a "very strong correlation between number of paintings and intensity of Later Stone Age occupation" at his Matopos sites.[14] Occupation ceased at many of these sites well before the end of the Later Stone Age. One cave with paintings was even deserted as early as 8 500 B.P. Nswatugi was deserted before 6 000 B.P., yet this is a major painted cave which includes perhaps the best preserved, freshest looking and most technically accomplished paintings in the country, painted at the end of a long sequence of superpositions. The main occupation of Bambata, another cave with a large number and variety of paintings, ended before 4 000 B.P.. If all this is correct, at least some of the rock art, including what seems to us some of the most developed and sophisticated, must be many millennia old.

The argument produced most frequently against such dating is that granite exfoliates too rapidly for paintings of any great age to survive. However, there is now some evidence from work in the Matopos that "different sites have markedly different rates of exfoliation, and often different panels in the same site show varying degrees of disintegration".[15] In two caves where exfoliation appeared slow, he estimated from the spalls found in excavation, that it had proceeded at a rate of 10mm in 40 000 to 200 000 years. As most spalls were 2-5mm thick, exfoliation occurred only between two and five times over this period: perhaps only once in every 8000 to 10 000 years. As exfoliation is random and so rare, this suggests that some parts of a cave surface and the paintings on it could well survive many

millennia.[16]

The Stone Age sequence in Mashonaland

The archaeological research in the Matopos cannot be matched elsewhere in Zimbabwe. The only firm demonstration that the Stone Age sequence established for the Matopos may be valid for the rest of Zimbabwe came from a single excavation of deposits in the large painted cave of Zombepata in the Guruve District of northern Mashonaland, within sight of the escarpment of the Zambezi Valley.[17] Here there was again evidence of extremely prolonged, if interrupted, human occupation and deep Middle Stone Age deposits. Seasonally damp conditions within the cave had however destroyed all signs of stratigraphy and all organic material and hence all evidence of worked bone or food debris. The Middle Stone Age material, in deposits nearly 2m deep, was all more than 40 000 years old.

Within these deposits it was claimed that there were two distinct concentrations of tools based on the manufacture of small blades, as was once claimed at Bambata. The imprecision of the excavation techniques, the absence of any detailed or distinct stratigraphy, the predetermined classification system and the crudeness of analysis prevented any definition of the precise nature and extent of these concentrations or how they related to the rest of the material. The temptation to interpret them once again in terms of the intrusion and co-existence of distinct human populations has not been resisted.[18] More economical interpretations - that Middle Stone Age activities and tool kits varied with needs, seasons and activities - avoid such simplistic equations between tool types and populations.

The Middle Stone Age deposits were again separated from later material by a thick layer of granite spalls and disintegrating larger granite blocks, marking a period of at least 4 000 years, ending about 21 000 B.P., when the cave was little inhabited and weathering agents were active. Immediately above this, Tshangula deposits, 30 cm thick, gave way about 13 000 B.P. to sparse, disturbed and eroded deposits containing Khami material. Given the nature of

these deposits, no great reliance can be placed on the single radiocarbon date of about 2 100 B.P. obtained from the latest levels. The scraper-based Pomongwe Industry is absent from Zombepata as it is from all of northern and eastern Zimbabwe, supporting the argument that it was a localised and specialised response to the particular challenges of the drier regions of the country.

The only dated Later Stone Age deposits on the Mashonaland plateau were exposed in excavations beneath the paintings at Diana's Vow in the Makoni District. Later Stone Age occupation started there 11 000 years ago and persisted and even alternated with Iron Age occupation until at least 600 A.D.[19]

The end of the Stone Age

Over the last few centuries before Christ and well into the Christian era, various species of domesticated cereal foods and domesticated animals were introduced progressively into southern Africa, making radical changes possible in the economy and way of life. Only the first step in this direction, the introduction of sheep, is manifest in Later Stone Age deposits in the caves. Evidence from brief or intermittent use of Bambata Cave as a temporary shelter just over 2 000 years ago, shows that Later Stone Age communities had by then acquired sheep and so added a minor pastoral component to their economies without causing any marked change in the basic hunting and gathering way of life.[20] They had also learnt to make pottery vessels and developed a distinct form of local pottery named after the cave and found occasionally in similar situations throughout the south-west of the country.

The introduction of metalworking in copper and iron, first for light weapons and arrowheads and later in sufficient quantities to make heavy tools like axes and hoes, enabled bush to be cleared and land farmed much more effectively. Farmers established semi-permanent villages and built substantial homesteads of wattle and daub houses. These define what archaeologists call the 'Iron Age'. Farmers could now depend on their own efforts at making their

own portions of land productive and on their own crops and livestock. Foraging and hunting were relegated to minor roles in the economy and only again became significant in times of hardship when rains and crops failed. The introduction of cattle, and with them private rights of property and ownership and the eventual growth of large herds, was to fuel radical changes in the way society was organised. These developments may have been slow and widely separated in time but their cumulative effects entirely changed every aspect of life. More and more hunters adopted the new strategies and become progressively more committed to and dependent on them. There is no doubt that, by a thousand years ago at least, most hunters had adopted farming, at least in part. Friction between surviving hunters and farmers over game, cattle and grazing would have been an inevitable consequence of their conflicting interests. The two ways of life differed not just in their technologies and economies. The ethos, beliefs and social organisation of farmers was necessarily entirely different from that of the hunters. This in turn, must have deeply affected the society and culture of the hunters with whom they were in contact, competition and conflict. There was no possibility of the hunters continuing their ancient way of life without being deeply affected by the changes: the fundamental ethos of the egalitarian, nomadic, hunting band became irrelevant.[21]

We cannot trace the interactions between the new societies of farmers, herders and metalworkers and the remnants of the Stone Age populations in Zimbabwe itself: archaeological work in this field has not yet begun. But in Botswana, it is possible to discern something of the outlines of a similar situation.[22] There too there were Stone Age pastoralists with the same distinctive Bambata pottery. By 500 A.D. some of these communities had added cattle to their herds and passed these on to later Bantu-speaking intruders. Between 600 and 1200 A.D., integrated hierarchies of settlements were established: a few large hilltop towns had a great many small homesteads or cattle posts on the plains and along the rivers around them. The populace of the latter

managed the herds of the stock owners in the towns but retained a Later Stone Age technology and depended on hunting for their own meat. Townsfolk traded ivory and skins with Stone Age hunters further afield. Well over a thousand years ago in Botswana there is a glimpse of Stone Age hunters being reduced to clients of powerful cattle owners within a single economic and social system. In Zimbabwe the same process seems likely to have occurred in the cattle lands of the south-west but in the parts of the country where soils were richer and rain more reliable, agriculture must have had a greater economic role and competition between hunter and farmer was probably more intense and prospects of partnership less. This was not a struggle that the hunters would win.

By a thousand years ago, farming was so successful, dynamic and expanding that pressures on suitable grazing and agricultural lands were starting to be felt. Villages grew large, some protected by stone walls and terraces. Gold and other metals were mined and traded widely. Communities were consolidating, developing a sense of ethnic ties and loyalties, forming larger social units and developing the organisations that were to grow into states, with capitals centred on zimbabwe, rulers' courts surrounded by stone walls, of which the largest was Great Zimbabwe. These controlled the cattle herds, mining, markets and traders; dominated the trade routes and substantial territories, both politically and militarily; and were supported by a hierarchy of towns and villages.[23] This cannot but have had a profound effect on Later Stone Age societies.

Some may have been able to continue little affected for a little longer in remote areas unattractive to farmers or herders, like the drier lowveld extending south of the Matopos to the Limpopo River, an area suitable only for extended pastoralism and for game. The populations in such regions may even have increased as hunters moved away from the settled farming areas. There are isolated radiocarbon dates for Later Stone Age deposits as late as 1200 A.D.but they are suspected to be from contaminated samples.[24] There is also a single and somewhat ambiguous item of

archaeological evidence that painting continued in these parts as recently as this. At Mtanye Shelter, in the southern lowveld, there are paintings on a surface that was only exposed after the fall of a large slab of rock. Pottery in the deposits under and against the fallen slab establish that the fall took place about the 13th century A.D.. Two radiocarbon dates place the fall as late as the 15th or 16th centuries A.D. but the samples, like those providing other late dates, are considered to have suffered contamination by material from later Iron Age occupation.[25]

Dating by content

Artists paint on the basis of what they know. The paintings therefore must necessarily depict the artists' communities, their physical appearance, dress, equipment and activities, though this may be mediated by all sorts of processes of selection and emphasis. The paintings need not have been made primarily as a historical record to inform us, even if indirectly and unintentionally, of a particular mode of life, economy and technology. Content can thus locate the paintings in a particular prehistoric or historic period and thus indicate their date.

Paintings of extinct species of animals could, in theory, provide an indication of the antiquity of the art but all the animals depicted lived in Zimbabwe over at least the last ten millennia and survived into historic times. Paintings of domesticated animals would place them in much more recent times and there are indeed several sites with paintings of domesticated sheep, in at least one case with their herders: this suggests an age of not much more than 2 000 years for at least some of the paintings. There may also be paintings of domesticated dogs, but the introduction of these has not been dated and, in any case, is likely to have happened well before sheep were introduced.

When it comes to correlating paintings of tools and weapons with the artefacts of the Stone Age, we are in some difficulty. There is nothing in the paintings to suggest that people used any tools incorporating microliths, the characteristic artefact of the Later Stone Age. But this

proves little as very few if any tools of any kind are shown in any paintings. More difficult to explain is that there is nothing in any painting to suggest that arrows were armed with the microliths or bone points of the period. The long bows and simple heavy flighted arrows shown in the paintings are much more consistent with the Middle Stone Age than the Later Stone Age, as archaeologists interpret them. They may also imply different hunting practices from those of the Later Stone Age.[26] The larger bow generates much greater and smoother power, fires a heavier arrow, especially if it has a flighted end, over greater distances and inflicts much greater damage and shock to its victim than the lighter weapon. All this is consistent with a strategy that concentrated on hunting bigger game by many hunters working together and perhaps able to feed more people in a camp more easily than what is believed to have been Later Stone Age practice. The bones in Middle Stone Age deposits, in which large game antelope are predominant, also correlate better with the animals shown in the paintings and in the few scenes of them being hunted and shot.

Only one somewhat ambiguous Zimbabwe painting might suggest that a digging stick may have been weighted with a bored stone like those very occasionally found in Later Stone Age deposits, used by some San and shown attached to sticks in many South African paintings. This absence is easily explained: the use of such stones was not a universal San practice and is, for instance, unknown to the Kung who only have to cope with light sand soils.

Discrepancies like these may indicate that the evidence from both archaeology and art is more restricted than previously thought and does not, in these cases, overlap. Faults may also lie in the accepted interpretations of the archaeological material. As archaeological research moves from typology to a more wide-ranging examination of society, one can expect that such worrying discrepancies will be explained.

Working on the presumptions that the paintings in Zimbabwe must be comparatively recent and that the majority

of paintings are observations by the artists of the life going on around them, many authors have sought evidence in the paintings of observations of immigrant groups, both 'Hottentot' herders and Bantu-speaking negroid immigrants whom archaeologists like to equate with the introduction of Iron Age farming and metalworking to southern Africa. If they exist, such observations obviously would also indicate the period of the paintings.

Cooke in particular, while never doubting that the artists themselves were San and could be located within the Later Stone Age, considered that this had survived until comparatively recently and repeatedly asserted that many paintings are illustrations of San observations of Iron Age people, animals and activities.[27] A single panel of paintings (**Pls.9.1, 9.2 and 10.1 below**) incorporates most of his examples.[28] The main figure (**Pl.10.1 below**) is "idling about, lying down in characteristic position, with one foot on the other knee and the hands behind the head, a typical Bantu position for rest. The women, however, are shown carrying articles on their heads".[29] The group's belongings include "baskets and gourds". The early painting that underlies the centre of the scene has been interpreted as a domesticated cow. Two animals with long legs and tails and upright pointed ears are described as domesticated dogs "very similar to the greyhound type of dog still favoured as a hunting dog by the local tribesman".[30] The example in the centre of the panel is seen as "leashed" by the striding human figure beside it (**Pl.9.2**), and leashing as a Bantu practice. A two-legged creature above two lines is taken as a domesticated chicken sitting on its nest (**Pl.9.1**). Complex scenes like this are interpreted as "ceremonies" and these are assumed to be alien on the basis that the artists were too simple to conduct communal ceremonies themselves.

Painting sequences in which "classical patience" is replaced by "the ebullient speed of the impressionist or caricaturist" are taken to reflect the "disturbed existence" of artists "dispersed by alien invaders".[31] Encounters between different groups are first interpreted as "battle

scenes" and then as illustrations of conflicts between San and Bantu groups.[32] Paintings of women grinding or pounding indicate that "scenes become domestic rather than nomadic, indicating that the people drawn belonged to a group practising a different economy, one that may well have included agriculture".[33] The foods being prepared are taken to represent domesticated cereal foods of farmers. Female figures emitting lines from their swollen bodies might illustrate iron smelting furnaces, for some Iron Age furnaces were moulded in the shapes of women with the smelt emerging from the genital area.[34]

All of this can be discounted as broad, imprecise and unsubstantiated generalization, much of it coloured by prejudices about racial characteristics. The example quoted above assumes male laziness and female industry to be specific racial characteristics of Bantu-speaking people. There is as little to support the absence of ceremony or ritual, dancing or feasting in San life: there is abundant evidence, for instance, that all San groups have communal dances. The image of San life as so nomadic that it precluded even such things as grindstones is as false. The use of pounders and grinders does not of itself demonstrate that the foods being prepared must have been domesticated: San gatherers certainly pounded and ground wild roots, bulbs, nuts and fruit in the normal course of food preparation. Gourds too were long collected and used as containers by San.

Images are also often misinterpreted. The "baskets" in **Pls.9.1 and 9.2** are much more likely to be skin bags like those used widely by San. The "cow" could just as well or better represent a young buffalo. The identification of the dogs ignores the long striped mane, the facial stripes, the long curved tusks and the white body markings that this creature shares with many of the human figures and which show that it is more a creature of the imagination than one that can be identified in the real world with any degree of certainty. It is superimposed on the figure holding the "leash" so it seems clear that the two paintings were not

done at the same time. The identification of the "chicken" even as a bird is doubtful.

More specific claims for evidence in the paintings of Iron Age equipment require more careful consideration. Cooke frequently quoted a claim that the figures in one cave wear Zulu headdresses, clothes and ornaments but never substantiated this with any examples or details, so we cannot know to what he was referring.[35] There are a very few paintings of men holding long staffs with elaborate heads (see **Figs.12.8**) and even rarer paintings of these staffs being used as spears and aimed at animals (**Figs.12.4, 12.5 or 12.6**).[36] There are more paintings of hunters holding arrows with large spiky barbs and heads (**Figs.7.14, 8.5, 9.15 or 12.5**). Some of these look as if they can only have been made of metal though there are certainly no known Iron Age or Bantu arrowheads that look like them. More careful consideration suggests the weapons are too complex, heavy and impractical to have been used in any way in the real world. As we shall see in Chapter 12, their contexts suggest that they are not realistic representations at all.

From paintings at thirteen different sites in which human figures are associated with oval or circular shapes, Cooke recognized the presence of Sotho, Tswana, Zulu, Ndebele, archaic Nguni and possibly Somali shields.[37] At least one of the shapes is painted on top of a figure's head, scarcely a normal way to carry a shield. The most detailed and convincing of these paintings, **Fig.9.33**, shows a group of people holding circular or spherical objects. These certainly look like illustrations of actual objects but it is as impossible to tell what they may be as it is to interpret the extraordinary variety of other objects that they carry, except to recognise that none of them is a weapon. The people who hold them are all in postures that almost certainly indicate that they are dancing. We shall see in Chapter 15 that these 'shield' shapes can all be placed more satisfactorily in a particular and widespread category of non-figurative designs that are regularly juxtaposed or superimposed on human figures.

The paintings of domesticated sheep, some of them shown in flocks with their herders, are not evidence of a people outside the Later Stone Age but rather confirm the substantial archaeological evidence from both Zimbabwe and South Africa that the domesticated sheep had been introduced into the region during the later stages of that period and efficiently managed by Stone Age peoples well before the development of the Iron Age. Cattle were certainly introduced into Zimbabwe later than sheep and well into the Iron Age. Their presence in the paintings would be a reliable indication that the art persisted after the development of fully-fledged farming societies in southern Africa. However, it can be difficult to distinguish young buffalo from cattle in the paintings and the very rare paintings of animals that have been interpreted as cattle are ambiguous and could equally represent buffalo.[38]

All told, there are no known paintings in Zimbabwe that are unambiguous, still less certain evidence that the artists had seen any Iron Age peoples or had any knowledge of their distinctive practices, of farming, of any of the products of farming, of metalworking or had any contacts with any society recorded in history. The ethos, beliefs and social organisation of farmers were necessarily entirely different from that of the hunters. None of this is reflected in the art, which retains its coherence, confidence, techniques, forms, subject matter, canon and principles of representation apparently unchanged throughout its course. It is for such reasons that one seems on sure ground in supposing that the art predates any substantial influence from farming societies, and is therefore at least a thousand years old and the bulk of it probably at least twice that age.

On the other hand, it is possible to claim that the paintings were concerned only with a very limited segment of human experience and activity, and that this was centered on particular beliefs and the practices associated with them. There is also good evidence that such beliefs can survive unchanged over long periods of time and severe social, political and economic dislocations and disruptions.[39]

Therefore there is no reason not to expect that paintings with such limited and esoteric concerns would not continue to be made whatever the external circumstances or that they would not ignore people and events that had no place within this very limited artistic canon. Thus, the absence of any illustrations of farming, for instance, is no indicator of date. But if, as I will attempt to show, the art had much wider concerns and ranged across most of society, even if it did not focus on particular individual people or events and was still in no way an intentional historical record, then one is on firmer ground in claiming that the absence of any indications of farmers or cattle herders is an indication that it belongs to a period predating these. The art was not so limited that it would have ignored these. Paintings of sheep and their herders provide some evidence for the date of the paintings in Zimbabwe and in South Africa there are paintings of the activities of foreign intruders detailing their dress, equipment and animals with such precision that it is possible to place firm historical dates on much of the art there. If these were acceptable subjects to the artists, there is reason to suppose that farming, farm animals and farmers would have been as acceptable, if they were indeed observed.

NOTES

1. Walker, 1987.

2. Cooke, Summers, and Robinson, 1966.

3. Walker, 1978, 1980.

4. Bullong, 1986.

5. Walker, 1980.

6. Bambata Cave was discovered in 1918 by Neville Jones, and excavated by him in the same year: Arnold and Jones, 1919; Jones, 1926. It was later excavated by Leslie Armstrong in 1929: Armstrong, 1931; re-excavated by Jones in 1938 -1939 to resolve his disagreements with Armstrong: Jones, 1940; and by Walker in 1980. Walker has only published his Matopos research in brief summary form so far: Walker, 1978 and 1980. Nswatugi Cave was dug by Jones in 1932. Rich Later Stone Age

deposits in this cave enabled him to define the Late Stone Age of Zimbabwe from the material he recovered: Jones, 1933. Walker excavated further deposits here in 1975. Pomongwe Cave was dug by Cooke in 1960-1963: Cooke, 1963a; and, once again, by Walker in 1980: Walker, 1980.

7. Phillipson, 1977: 27.

8. Walker, 1987: 142.

9. Armstrong, 1931: 273.

10. Cooke, 1963a.

11. Walker, 1978.

12. Walker, 1980.

13. Walker, 1987: 144-5.

14. Walker, 1987: 146.

15. Walker, 1987: 144.

16. Walker, 1987: 144.

17. Cooke, 1971a.

18. Phillipson, 1977: 28.

19. Cooke, 1979.

20. Walker, 1983.

21. Garlake, 1982.

22. Denbow, 1984, 1986.

23. Garlake, 1978 and 1982.

24. Robinson, 1964.

25. Walker, 1987: 145.

26. Manhire et al, 1985, discuss the implications of different bow types for hunting methods in connection with one particular bow form not found in the Zimbabwean paintings but the ideas developed seem relevant also to the Zimbabwean paintings.

27. e.g. Cooke, 1958, 1964a, 1964c, 1965a, 1965d, 1967, 1968.

28. Cooke, 1964c.

29. Cooke, 1964c: 4.

30. Cooke, 1964c: 5.

31. Cooke, 1969: 49, 68.

32. Cooke, 1959: 159.

33. Cooke, 1964c: 4.

34. Cooke, 1965a.

35. Cooke, 1964c: 4; 1968: 33-4.

36. Cooke, 1958: 137.

37. Cooke, 1964a.

38. Izzett, 1980.

39. Lewis-Williams, 1984b.

3. A HUNDRED YEARS OF ROCK ART STUDIES

The first published record of paintings in Zimbabwe, which between 1890 and 1980 was the British colony of Southern Rhodesia, was by J. Theodore Bent, a traveller with antiquarian inclinations brought out from England to examine the ruins of Great Zimbabwe within a few months of British occupation of the country. In 1891, on his way back to the east coast after his work, Bent was told of paintings near his camp at Mutoko: "I hurried thither and took some hasty sketches of them: all sorts of wild animals were wonderfully well executed; the figures of warriors with poised spears and quivers of arrows are, however grotesque."[1] Bent's distinction between the quality of the images of animals and people, like so many other dogmatic statements about the paintings, thereafter runs unquestioned through most descriptions of the art.[2]

In 1899, the Rhodesian Scientific Association was established in Bulawayo, to concern itself primarily with the natural and human sciences. The first paper to be presented to it was a brief description of some rather insignificant paintings beside the road cut by the first British forces on their way to occupy the country, near its entrance into Matabeleland.[3] Over the next 13 years, several more descriptions of paintings in Matabeleland appeared. They included the first sketched copies, the first photographs and the first colour plates of Zimbabwean paintings, all reproduced with a quality unmatched in Zimbabwe today.

In 1902, a Museum was established in Bulawayo. By agreement with the funders, the Curators were to be geologists. Successive Curators found and described many more paintings. By 1905, the first Stone Age deposits beneath paintings had been trenched and tools recovered and described.[4] In 1908, Silozwane, one of the largest painted caves in the Matopo Hills, was located, photographed and described.[5] Today visited by many tourists in the course of a day's drive through the Hills, Silozwane was then the goal of a collecting expedition by the Curator, which involved a

long bicycle ride from the town by moonlight and a two-day walk with porters and guides.

Richard Nicklin Hall was the first Curator of Great Zimbabwe with particular responsibility for the care and publicity of these ruins, the leading advocate of their immense and exotic antiquity, and their despoiler. After he had been internationally reviled for his work there and dismissed in the ensuing controversy, he became interested in rock paintings. He first described paintings near his house outside Bulawayo.[6] By 1912, he claimed to have a record of some 300 painted sites in the country.[7] The month before his death in 1914, he completed a book on the paintings in Rhodesia.[8] It was never published and is a thin, derivative piece of work, as dogmatic and unscholarly and filled with grandiose but unsubstantiated claims as all Hall's other work. At least in part, when it numbers the paintings Hall had seen, it is, on its own evidence, simply untrue. Still, Hall's pride was legitimate in the rapidity with which knowledge of paintings had grown in the very few years since the first was discovered, through the efforts of "enquirers - [who] all could be told on the fingers of two hands... Can any old established country in either hemisphere show such a splendid record?"[9]

He described 27 painted sites in the Matopo Hills, most of them very small and omitting, for instance, the large painted cave of Silozwane, published six years before. Of the 20 sets of paintings described from the rest of the country, Hall had only seen two large caves, one of them near Great Zimbabwe. Hall's assertive tone is captured in his interpretation of the paintings of ovals which have intrigued and puzzled everyone (and are discussed and illustrated here in Chapter 15). He had seen four of the nine he had been told of - of the many hundreds now known to exist. He was certain that they all represented the Victoria Falls; more than that, "so true to nature are certain of these representations that the actual point of view of the Bushman, the spot at which he received his impressions can be located to within a couple of score yards":[10] the bank of the river

at the foot of the gorge immediately below the Falls. The dark ovals represented the dark basalt face of the Falls at low water and the white paint that characteristically surrounds the ovals and forms a semicircular cap above them represented the falling water and the rising spray. Hall also focussed on two other subjects which we now recognise are related: snakes with "hills" along their backs, sometimes peopled with animals and humans, and a "large quadruped" with "along its back... deep notches throughout its length" (**see Pl.15.10 below**).[11]

Hall was the first to assert, correctly, that the paintings were all of considerable age. He felt on "very sure ground" in claiming that the paintings belonged to a time before farming, for the artists painted in open, undefended or indefensible sites "without fear of molestation", and the paintings indicated no knowledge of the livestock, crafts or activities of farmers.[12] His close examination of paintings with a magnifying glass enabled him to distinguish exactly how paintings were done: the painters first drew an outline of their subject with a very fine brush, then thickened the outline with a second layer of paint applied with a broader brush in "freehand sweeps" and finally filled it in with several washes laid horizontally and vertically with still thicker brushes.[13]

In 1912, Neville Jones, a young missionary of the London Missionary Society with some experience of geology and a long enthusiasm for archaeology, was posted to Hope Fountain Mission on the edge of the Matopo Hills, where he worked for the next 22 years. In 1917 he and a colleague from the Museum had discovered Bambata, another large painted cave in the Matopos and conducted there the first competent excavations of Stone Age or cave deposits in the country.[14] This was, for Jones, the start of years of work devoted to establishing the Stone Age sequence of the country. By 1926 he had already published his Stone Age in Rhodesia. Serious, devoted, assured, authoritative and familiar with the advances in prehistory in South Africa and overseas, he became the country's first professional archaeologist when he

retired from his missionary work in 1935 and was appointed Senior Assistant and later Keeper in charge of prehistory, ethnography and history in the Bulawayo Museum. Jones recognized that the paintings deserved responsible research. When, twenty years after Hall's death, his daughter persuaded A.J.H. Goodwin, Lecturer in archaeology at the University of Cape Town, to edit his book on the paintings for publication, this was opposed by Jones: "Think the position out carefully before you commit yourself to the production of a pre-scientific account of our paintings."[15] Jones himself was so conscious of the methodological and conceptual problems and frustrations of studying the paintings that he was never persuaded to develop the same interest in them that he had for other aspects of prehistory.

The study of rock paintings was never considered of much interest or consequence by the Rhodesian public. A tiny number of early enthusiasts explored for paintings for their own personal satisfaction and without any outside support or encouragement. To some, the paintings were simply one of the many marvels of the veld. Others were attracted by their aesthetic beauty. Others were intrigued by the inexplicable events and objects that the artists had painted: others 'collected' paintings like small boys used to collect postage stamps. Most accepted that the painters must have been Bushmen, that they were probably also responsible for the stone tools found in so many caves and shelters and that they lived as hunters well before farming was introduced to the country. Almost everyone saw the paintings as simple records of the everyday life of these very simple and primitive folk, recorded admittedly with some skill but evidence of no coherent system of thought or belief. Consequently very few people indeed found any intellectual challenge in the art. It was in any case, extremely frustrating to anyone who wished to find any significance in it beyond a record of what the artists saw and did, because so little was known about the artists.

No one better exemplifies the strengths of such amateurs and the contributions that they could make to prehistory in

an undeveloped country than Lionel Cripps. Born in 1863, he left school and England at 16, emigrated to South Africa and, at 27, joined the Pioneer Column that occupied what was to be Rhodesia. In the subsequent grant of land, he claimed the farm in the remote Vumba mountains on the eastern border of the country that was to be his home for the remaining sixty years of his life. Here he fell in love entirely, overwhelmingly and for ever with almost every aspect of his new country. With self-government in 1923, he was elected the first Speaker of the Legislative Assembly and remained in that position for 13 years. He became fascinated by everything around him and, for at least the last 16 years of his life, recorded it all in his diaries.[16] In painstaking watercolours, done from children's paintboxes, he recorded birds the cats killed, moths and butterflies that he found and painted before pressing them between the pages, ever-changing views of mountains, mists and clouds from his house, strange rock formations seen from the windows of the carriage on the train journeys to Salisbury, slugs, snails and fungi.

After leaving office at 72, rock paintings became his dominant interest. His large range of friends and acquaintances told him of paintings on their farms or of which they had heard. He would visit and copy these and then explore the hills around and invariably find many more. On these trips, at night he slept as often as not in the open veld amongst the hills. Over the next six years he filled eleven large albums with tracings and copies of over 7000 individual images from over 900 sites.[17] He was entirely unselective and copied every painting he could reach at every site he visited, including hundreds of very small sites. His copies lack precision and detail but are more objective than most and he invented or 'improved' little. Of his age in what he saw as propriety, he carefully covered the genitals of every figure he copied with hinged stamp paper.[18]

When a Monuments and Relics Commission was established in 1936, Cripps was appointed a Commissioner and served for the next ten years. This gave him the opportunity to visit

many paintings new to him, to meet the authorities in prehistory and make contacts with others interested in the paintings. He was devoted to the work of the Commission. Only his work towards establishing a National Archives and preserving and publishing accounts of the early explorations of the country gave him greater pleasure.

His views on the paintings were open-minded and pragmatic. Controversy over who the artists were was resolved for him when he first saw Bushmen, at the Empire Exhibition in Johannesburg in 1936: "Went to the Exhibition and saw 40 Bushmen and women and children... All looked intelligent and I can well believe that these people were the artists."[19] He notes that these Bushmen were taken to Cape Town after the exhibition until, in 1939, "it was arranged to allow them to roam and be preserved in a habitable portion of the Kalahari".[20]

Eventually, as he entered his eighties, Cripps circulated and published some of his views on the paintings.[21] His interpretations of individual images was sometimes bizarre: he claimed that he had copied paintings showing horses, donkeys, sheep, riding oxen, the shields and weapons of South African Bantu-speaking groups, Zulu head-rings, Somali headdresses, men with pigtails wielding swords, eager slave-raiders beating their victims, boomerangs, guns, European and "Eastern visitors" but reference to the album in which he compiled a collection of his exotica shows that he was referring to quite ordinary illustrations of people, animals, activities and equipment, easily explained in terms of everyday Bushman experience.[22]

Cripps was the only person at the time who thought seriously about the artists intentions. Starting from the premise that "primitive people are purposeful in a serious way and their undertakings are carried out in that spirit and not merely as a way of passing the time", he concluded that the paintings therefore "serve a serious purpose" and were not done simply for "fun, sport or to satisfy an aesthetic longing".[23] There were no signs that they were used in magic and their value as a historical record was, for the

artists, incidental. After decades of contrary theories, the most recent investigations of the art confirm these insights.

He counted the relative proportions of different images amongst his copies: the first attempt to use numerical analysis to reveal patterns in the art. From this, he established the relative frequencies of different colour superimpositions in the paintings and constructed a sequence from the regularities he observed.[24] He summarised his interpretations of subjects in the same way: of the paintings in 919 sites, 269 showed dead people, 136 graves, 457 causes of death, 761 totems, and 681 mourners (only 5 showed domesticated animals).[25] There thus seemed to be an emphasis on death, which was extended by paintings of people falling, being charged by animals, with heads hanging down, with limbs chopped off, and dancing and holding their heads in grief.[26] Cripps concluded: "Most, if not all, of the paintings in the country of Southern Rhodesia are connected directly or indirectly with funerary ceremonies, it is likely [the Bushmen] would have wished to perpetuate the memory of their leaders and great men and brave men, especially the latter."[27] Once again, Cripps had isolated and identified some of the most significant components of the paintings and come close to current interpretations of them: though, as we shall see in Chapter 10, the incomplete, fallen and recumbent figures, the "grieving" figures holding their heads and the dancers are better explained as depicting trancing rather than death.

The unselfconscious zest, energy and delight that Cripps brought to everything was given fully to the paintings. Cripps did not have the inclinations, ambitions, persistence, cast of mind, intellectual self-confidence or academic training to turn this into rigorous or coherent theoretical research. This may seem a loss but perhaps the sense of sheer enjoyment that was his and is the hallmark of the true amateur is even more important. If the paintings could mean so much to one man, one can hope they can do the same for many others, especially now that our understanding of the

prehistory of the country and of the place of the paintings in it is or can be so much more sophisticated. They were always a large part of Cripps' physical and mental landscapes and so they can be for others who love the countryside like he did.

Samuel Impey was a Cape Town doctor who had been Medical Superintendent of the lunatics, criminals and lepers incarcerated on the notorious Robben Island. He had been dismissed for insisting on the release of the lepers whom, he claimed, were all cured, against the evidence of his own inadequate medical records, his colleagues and the Leprosy Commission.[28] In 1926, a book of his was published which sought to prove that the southern African paintings were not the work of Bushmen but done by the same people who painted in the French and Spanish caves: "I have known Bushmen all my life... and knowing the Bushmen, I have always been unable to believe that people of such a low and degraded type of humanity could have painted the pictures attributed to them. I have no doubt that there may be a few gifted Bushmen, but it is a curiousa [sic] to say the least of it, that no one has ever met such a man."[29] In the year his book was published, a panel of paintings was discovered by Dr. Williams, a local Government Medical Officer, on his farm, Allendale, about 50 miles from Great Zimbabwe. They seemed to show white people playing strange musical instruments. Impey was told of them and hastened up from Cape Town to visit them and, in an interpretation as reckless as his medical diagnoses, pronounced the paintings the work of ancient Egyptians. "The painter's intimate acquaintance with Egyptian life suggests an Egyptian or a Bushman from Egypt. Sabaeans must also be added to the list of probable painters... I have never known Bushmen able to paint anything like it... Reading up authorities on the subject of Egyptian manners and customs, I found that they corroborate this picture in every detail. One of the instruments was a harp. [Others show] a guitar... two pipes... tambourines and cymbals [and women] clapping hands." To judge from the women's postures and the details of their "wigs", "the

painter must have been intimately acquainted with the manners of the time". "[The painting] depicts a period of 4500 years ago."[30]

Impey presented all this to a meeting of the South African Association for the Advancement of Science in Salisbury in July 1927 and was met with disbelief, mockery and ridicule. Prof. A.L. du Toit, "a geologist with a high reputation", suggested that they might equally represent "European girls in bathing suits with towels round the shoulders, one holding a mirror and doing her hair". The British archaeologist Miles Burkitt, took Impey to say that the scene portrayed an ancient Egyptian "school of dancing or music or even deportment". Dorothea Bleek, the preeminent South African authority on the Bushmen and their paintings, "a quiet lady armed with a prodigious sheaf of tracings made havoc among these and many other theories [and] attempts to account for certain strange features of Bushman paintings... by suggesting that they represent people of ancient civilised races... Her paper was the climax to a discussion on the subject generally. It held an audience of experts and many listeners absorbed." Quite rightly, for she anticipated the results of today's interpretations more closely than anyone else: "There were standard characters and incidents in Bushman folklore which people knew at sight; drawings of dancers, ceremonies of sorcerers in ceremonial dress and people being metamorphosed into frogs, birds and animals accounted quite simply for even otherwise most inexplicable things in Bushman art."[31] After the conference, Bleek went to Allendale and again pronounced the paintings to be the "work of different generations of Bushmen", the figures in question to represent men or boys, the objects they held too faded to identify though one was certainly a hunting bow and that there was "nothing to connect [the scene] with Egypt".[32] Despite this, the controversy reached as far as The Illustrated London News, for the Egyptian identification lent obvious support to all those who believed that Great Zimbabwe had similar origins.[33] The mare's nest of paintings of foreigners continued to be sought and found by

many people.

The British Association Conference and Miles Burkitt

In 1929, the British Association for the Advancement of Science was to meet in Johannesburg. It chose to focus on the prehistory of the region, probably as a response to recent exciting and controversial finds of fossil hominids - including the skulls of the first australopithecines in the Transvaal, whose analysis and interpretation by Raymond Dart, the young Professor of Anatomy at the University of the Witwatersrand, was hotly and vainly disputed by the leading anatomists in Britain, and of what is now recognized as a neanderthal in what was then Broken Hill in Northern Rhodesia. The Association was particularly determined to try to resolve the controversy over the origins of the stone ruins in Rhodesia.

The preparations for the conference led to more intense international collaboration and research and greater advances in prehistory in a very short time than Rhodesia or Zimbabwe were ever to experience again. In 1927 Miles Burkitt toured the region to advise how to develop methods of investigation for the study of the Stone Age and the paintings.[34] He was one of the first lecturers in prehistory at the University of Cambridge and was considered at the time "one of the topmost archaeologists in Britain".[35] He had also been "in almost at the beginning of the discovery of Palaeolithic art" in Europe for he had been the "first foreign pupil" and "first foreign disciple but also life-long friend" of the Abbe Henri Breuil: the greatest of the pioneers in the discovery, documenting and study of the cave paintings of Europe.[36]

Burkitt only paid brief visits to a small selection of paintings. He went to see Domboshawa, a popular resort and the only major paintings then within easy reach of Salisbury; Makumbe, not far beyond Domboshawa; and Nswatugi in the Matopos: all large caves covered in paintings. He also saw small sets of paintings on the outskirts of Salisbury at Glen Norah and a nearby granite quarry and those at Allendale, which he took upon himself to rename 'Impey's Cave'.[37]

Burkitt equated the study of Bushman paintings with the

study of the prehistoric paintings in Europe and he saw both as purely archaeological problems. As in Europe, what was needed was to assign them to the Stone Age cultures to which they belonged. "All the... methods of investigation that have been employed in studying the [stone] industries can be used in the study of the art, and, as before, stratigraphy and typology are the most important."[38] Through typology, different styles of painting could be defined. The assumption was that paintings in the same style must have been done in the same period. Given the fortunate fact that many paintings were superimposed over others, creating a stratigraphy of successive paintings, the "laws of superposition" would enable a chronological sequence of styles to be established.

For Burkitt, the primary significance of the paintings was as chronological signposts, even though these might stand isolated in an incomprehensible cultural wilderness. This now seems a narrow and inappropriate aim. There is much more to the art than its date. Today even prehistorians value the paintings primarily for the insight they might give into the systems of thought and belief of the artists, something no other remains of the remote past can do as well. Although Burkitt recognized that "in Rhodesia several investigators were inclined to consider that the paintings had a rather deeper significance", he inclined to the South African view of their paintings as being "in the way of "wall-papers". To him, the art was no more than "the result of an innate artistic tendency in the people, and something intensely personal and, as it were, extra and not essentially necessary to the actual business of living. Further, it is difficult to see how outside circumstances can have had much modifying effect on its production."[39] Burkitt thus eliminated all possibility of insight art might bring to the perceptions and conceptions of the artists' society. In this he was followed unthinkingly by the recognized authorities on the paintings for over fifty years.

At Domboshawa, Burkitt illustrated the efficacy of his approach by identifying a chronological sequence based

primarily on a consistent and restricted choice of colours that changed over time and correlated to some extent with choice of subject and style. "For reasons completely unknown and possibly merely capricious, the peoples who drew in different styles at different periods seem to have preferred to use different colours."[40] Using this neat, simple and workable system of colour-as-style-as-chronological marker, despite his very limited exposure to the paintings, Burkitt was bold enough to claim that the paintings of the whole country could be divided into "five ages" or "three broad periods".

Burkitt recognized that the art badly needed further investigation and persuaded the South African Prime Minister, J.B.M. Hertzog, to invite to the British Association Conference the Abbe Breuil himself, now the newly appointed Professor of Prehistory at the College de France, France's most prestigious teaching institution. Burkitt must also have had a hand in arranging for the investigation of Great Zimbabwe, by Gertrude Caton-Thompson, a former student of his in Cambridge and a forceful personality, who had learnt in Egypt how to approach the problems of large settlement sites that lacked a clear historical context. Burkitt almost certainly also selected Leslie Armstrong to re-excavate the Stone Age deposits in Bambata Cave. Armstrong had spent several years excavating at Creswell Crags, the "classic cave site of Britain", where Palaeolithic engravings on mammoth ivory had been found in 1875, and he and Burkitt served together, as Secretary and Chairman, on the 'Committee for the Exploration of Caves in the Derbyshire District' for over 20 years.

Leslie Armstrong came to Rhodesia with his expectations of the country's prehistory formed by Burkitt and his experience of Derbyshire. As we have seen, he claimed that at Bambata, two distinct levels containing tools made on flakes were intercalated amongst more substantial deposits of technologically more primitive 'Mousterian' tools. He associated the flake tools with invasions of 'neanthropes' - the first true men and the first artists - into a world

peopled by subhuman neanderthals. This was what was then believed to have occurred in Europe and it was now shown to have occurred also in Africa. Armstrong also claimed that pigments of some colours were only found in particular 'neanthropic' layers and that the resulting stratified sequence of pigments matched the colour sequence of the paintings on the cave wall.[41] If correct, this would not only indisputably confirm the validity of Burkitt's styles but also establish their precise chronological and cultural contexts.

As the only knowledgeable archaeologist in the country, Jones guided Burkitt on his tour. He had considerable reservations about Burkitt's approach to the paintings. His experience taught him that the past of southern Africa was very different from that of Europe. He recognized that disciplines beside prehistory had equally important contributions to make to the study of the rock art. He doubted whether styles were so easily distinguishable or definable and preferred to see change in the art in terms of at best broad general trends from "schematic" through "impressionistic" to "naturalistic".[42] He doubted even more whether colour was an indicator of style. Common sense suggested it was inherently improbable, given that the pigments were all oxides of iron and all equally common and equally accessible at any period.

Doubting Armstrong's findings in particular, Jones returned to Bambata and excavated there once again in 1939. He was able to show that "the intercalation of two distinct layers... observed by Armstrong is to be explained by natural agency and has no cultural significance", that there was "no satisfying evidence of the presence of a Mousterian culture... the evidence for which is negated by the discovery of a flake industry culture in advance of the European Mousterian and belonging to the Middle Stone Age at a lower level" and that changes in the pigments associated with the different deposits could not be correlated with the painting sequence. Jones found a piece of red pigment, the colour of the latest paintings, in the earliest deposits at Bambata.[43]

The Stone Age of Rhodesia followed a different course from that of Europe, European concepts of prehistory were inappropriate to Africa and Armstrong had been blinded to the implications of his own evidence by the strength of preconceptions formed in Derbyshire.

Leo Frobenius

The 1929 conference also brought a team of German artists and excavators to southern Africa led by Leo Frobenius, President of the Frankfurt Institute for the Study of Culture Morphology and his country's most eminent ethnographer. He was refused permission to investigate Great Zimbabwe by the Rhodesian Government in favour of Caton-Thompson but, between January and May 1929, he and his team made over 400 copies of paintings in Rhodesia, particularly in the Wedza and Makoni Districts. Frobenius' approach to the paintings was entirely different from Burkitt's. He had not come to teach, help or advise but to accumulate a solid body of material that would demonstrate the influences of foreign culture-complexes on southern Africa's remote past. His imaginative range was enormous, his conclusions wide-ranging and the copies of paintings made by many of his team accurate, painstaking and still unsurpassed in scale as well as skill. Frobenius recognized "several absolutely independent styles which correspond clearly to different periods and independent creative forces" and, once again, members of his team tried their hands at defining a chronological sequence of styles from the many superpositions of paintings at Makumbe.[44] Frobenius concentrated his attention on one of these styles, defined by tall, static, monumental, male figures with stiff, mannered postures, wide shoulders and narrow waists. These he defined as the "classic" or, from the shape of their torsoes, the "cuneiform" or "wedge" style (see **Figs.7.9 and 7.10 below**).[45] These paintings were, for Frobenius, quite distinct from the vivid "ethnographic" Bushman paintings of animals and of people engaged in the many activities of a hunting life but based primarily on "hyperborean shamanistic thinking" in which "everything can be reconstituted" and "transformed".[46]

The wedge-shaped figures came from an artistic tradition in which artists with a „deep sensibility" and an "imaginative sense of life" followed a "canonically strict code" with a "prescribed vocabulary of forms". It was a "symbolic art...derived not from nature but from symbolical concepts... born in the life of the soul and of the emotions" and expressing "mystic sentiments" with a "spiritual tenor". "Concepts of the mind" and "very advanced speculation" produced "transliterations of phenomena of the interior life".[47] Discounting the flowery language, sixty years later many students of the art find a greater affinity with this aspect of Frobenius' approach than with any other writings on the art.

Some painted caves that Frobenius saw contained inhumations behind stone walls plastered with clay. These are now known to be recent burials of local Shona chiefs, but Frobenius presumed that they were contemporary with the rock paintings. He also assumed that the plastered walls had originally been covered in paintings similar to those on the cave walls around them. This was, to him, evidence of the "ritual basis" of this "mural art".[48]

He thus conflated two different epochs of prehistory, separated by many centuries and with no cultural links between them, and collected and used current Shona myths to interpret the paintings. Shona folklore appeared to contain evidence of the sacrifice of divine kings, of maidens sacrificed to bring rain, of a moon cult and of a great empire, whose pale shadow Frobenius believed had survived in the empire of Mutapa, one of the successor states to Great Zimbabwe, whose capital the Portuguese visited and traded with from the start of the 16th century.[49] For Frobenius, the most significant themes of the paintings matched these stories. Recumbent figures with attendants beside them were "pietas" of the deaths and burials of divine sacrificial kings (see **Pl.10.1 below**).[50] Other figures, associated with lines that seemed to represent rain or rivers, were young maidens sacrificed to bring rain (see **Fig.10.4 below**).[51] For Frobenius, all these elements pointed to the paintings,

Great Zimbabwe, the Mutapa state and the Shona as all belonging to the single 'culture-complex' of Erythraa, which also included the ancient civilizations of south-west Asia, Egypt and Crete.[52]

Frobenius is the source of a great deal of subsequent nebulous, inflated mystification of the art by German writers [53] but his work was entirely disregarded in southern Africa. This is largely, of course, because he wrote in German. But he also made a poor impression on archaeologists at the British Association Conference as "an inveterate publisher of superficialities, a chancer... a charlatan... pandering to popular fancy and to certain Nationalist politicians".[54] Controversy was further inflamed when it was revealed in the South African Parliament that Dr. D.F. Malan, Minister of Education in the Nationalist Government, had made an unauthorized grant of what was then a very large sum of money, $5000, to Frobenius to further his work on the paintings and Erythraa.[55] Malan hailed Frobenius as "a new Columbus" or "Copernicus" who had "shifted the centre of gravity" and "had shown the whole world that there is a culture, a whole world [in southern African prehistory] that we did not know of". The Opposition, led by Gen. J.C. Smuts, was outraged that the money had not gone to a South African. The Prime Minister, Hertzog, then accused Smuts and his supporters of "anti-German" bias claiming they would willingly support any English applicant. In Rhodesia, Frobenius generated his own myths and local settlers were convinced for years that he had looted a large amount of gold from the ruins of a zimbabwe that his team had excavated near Mutoko.

Frobenius' poor local reputation and his obvious mistakes in attributing the paintings to the forebears of the Shona were used to dismiss his much more important recognition of the art as a system of symbols which expounded fundamental beliefs. In any case, this also ran so clean contrary to all local preconceptions of the art, the artists and their society that it was both unbelievable and shocking: "His theories have not stood the test of criticism and one

wonders how he could have made such remarks as... 'in Rhodesia we find a canonically strict code of art' and similar generalizations about the immensely varied art."[56]

Abbe Henri Breuil

During his brief tour of Rhodesia after the conference in 1929, Breuil had time only to make "brief notes" on paintings "seen far too quickly" but at least he whetted his appetite for a future return.[57] He only saw the paintings that Burkitt had also visited. Like Burkitt, his interest was in the sequence of styles and, also like Burkitt, he believed these were largely definable by the colours of pigments that the artists of different periods preferred. He recognized seven successive styles of painting at Makumbe and five at Bambata.[58] However, he also noted figures whose "profiles resembled those of predynastic Egypt" at Domboshawa and, of course, the possible Egyptian figures at Allendale.[59] These were later to become his only concern.

After the German occupation of France in 1940, Breuil took refuge in Lisbon until, in 1942, Smuts, now Prime Minister of South Africa and himself deeply interested in the remote past of southern Africa, brought him to South Africa. Breuil was appointed a Research Officer in the South African Bureau of Archaeology, the body whose establishment he had done much to promote. He spent much of the next three years studying paintings.

In 1947 Breuil retired from the College de France and began regular annual visits back to southern Africa. At seventy, he had suddenly become an old man.[60] He was no longer interested in paintings of "hideous little Bushman figures"[61]: they were outside the mainstream of human or artistic progress, too recent to be significant in world prehistory. He sought a subject more dramatic and worthy of him in his central position on the world stage and soon found it. Reminiscent of Frobenius, he claimed to recognise some paintings in which "so much attention is paid to form that the style might almost be described as academic. The perfection of some of the animal paintings ... makes them far

superior to Bushman animal paintings."[62] "Often achieving real distinction, they show a general tendency to static 'academic' portrayal of human beings and animals"[63] and clearly belonged to "an academic art tradition that contrasts with the 'human art of action'... of the Bushmen".[64] They were "superior" to the work of Bushmen which were "usually full of life but small, anatomically weak and with a tendency towards diagrammatic art".[65] "We are at last out of the rut of Bushman paintings which are only a few hundred years old."[66]

A single painting in Namibia, 'The White Lady of the Brandberg', became his inspiration. The book in which he summed up his life's work was dedicated to her: "Wearing the costume of a Minoan bullfighter and carrying a flower, Isis and Diana in one... Eternally she walks there, young, beautiful and supple, almost aerian in poise. In ancient times all her own people walked to contemplate her adored image and all went on walking for centuries, not only Men but the Oryxes, Springbuck, Ostriches, Giraffes, Elephants and Rhinoceroses swayed by her magic. In my turn, it was for her sake I walked... Across deserts, we walked towards her... captivated by her incomparable grace... I spoke of her to the world of the living, after having once more dreamed at her feet of the infinite mystery in the history of ancient migrations. To her... I have devoted several of the precious years which remain to me. There I learnt a kind of marvellous gospel which it now seems to me opportune to declare in this troubled world, that of the living importance of those splendours, useless in material life, and so essential to the life of the spirit."[67]

The White Lady was, for Breuil, the most vivid evidence of a foreign presence in the southern art, perhaps the work of a "ship's company of... a mixed band of foreigners [who] in the course of their journeying... brought beliefs much as are found in Egypt and Crete, and an artistic gift probably inspired by these civilizations".[68] Some of southern Africa's Stone Age art was not only part of Mediterranean civilization. "Did the folk [of this period] (which we

relegate... to a very distant date)... cast the seeds from which the great Egyptian and Cretan arts developed? Perhaps a dream; perhaps the truth."[69]

Breuil's first studies to support his thesis took him to the Brandberg and Erongo mountains of Namibia.[70] In the paintings around the White Lady, Breuil saw figures with Semitic profiles, aquiline noses, helmets, aigrettes, elaborate robes and exotic weapons. If such details were not convincing enough evidence of foreigners, Breuil's assistant, Mary Boyle, found fundamental characteristics in the paintings of sexual and racial equality, feminism and multiracialism, principles she believed alien to Africa. With the White Lady, "there are men of various races before and behind her, which seems to indicate an equality of status with men, recognized only by advanced civilizations such as those of Crete and Etruria".[71] "More than one race is represented in the procession. Certainly no primitive, uncultured people would depict such ceremonies or give such a central position to a woman."[72] After all the emotion and theorizing the White Lady has generated, it is sad to recognise, as almost everyone but Breuil and Boyle had recognized, that she is, after all, indubitably a man, carrying a bow and with his penis crossed by a spotted bar.

Breuil came back to Rhodesia in 1948 to look for further evidence of his alien civilizations. His work was cut abruptly short when Roger Summers, the archaeologist who now occupied Neville Jones' post and who accompanied him, decided that a short-lived general strike by African workers in Bulawayo made conditions there unsafe: "an unfortunate occurrence (social unrest) prevented me finishing my copies... Mr. Summers, whose car we depended on, was forced to return to his family in Bulawayo at short notice, and we with him... this makes me furious. All I have is indifferent photographs."[73] Breuil was however able to return and complete his studies two years later.

Sadly, his ability even to see paintings was now in almost complete decline. This was not helped by his bizarre

methods of copying, involving wiping the paintings with water and assistants holding almost opaque sheets of "very strong... sulphurated paper" over them, on which he drew pencil marks "so faint they are scarcely visible", to give the general size and relationships of the figures, lifting the paper at intervals to check what was underneath. "The second step is to redraw each figure by eye."[74] The results are scarcely copies. They are extraordinarily inaccurate sketches, full of details that are misread, misunderstood or simply invented. They are the fantasies of someone obsessed, imagining all sorts of exotic elements, rather than attempts at accurate reproduction.

Many of the paintings that Breuil studied in the Masvingo District, including those at Allendale, do form a clearly definable, distinctive and circumscribed set of human figures painted mainly in white and ornamented in red. Their relationship to the Namibian paintings is also probably close. Most of the figures are of men but few carry the usual bow and arrows. Breuil again assumed that they were illustrations of light-skinned, red-haired foreigners, that they were the work of the foreigners themselves and that their origins again lay in the civilizations of ancient Egypt and Crete. The absence of weapons was evidence that "the energies of these people were devoted to other things than hunting and war... The paintings, in fact, suggest that in general the authors were peaceful settlers, leading a cheerful and relatively comfortable existence... amusing themselves in common in various ways; in fact as I studied them, their sociable carefree attitudes recalled nothing as much as a party of picnickers, an image which supplied me with a familiar means of describing their civilization and art... Should we, I wonder, attribute to their civilization the culture of the vine?... Whatever the final destiny of the 'foreigners' in Rhodesia and South-West Africa, their derivation from Nilotic sources is evident in the paintings which they left behind, as much in the general character of the paintings as in the features and accoutrements which they portray... I use the word 'Nilotic' as implying neither

exclusively Egyptian nor exclusively Cretan origins, but as signifying by many similarities a relationship with both civilizations which is as yet obscure."[75] He contrasted his "Picnic Style" with a painting in the Matopo Hills of "figures running at full speed: strangers probably, to the region which they are crossing rapidly instead of engaging in peaceful pursuits".[76]

These are extraordinarily naive, obtuse and perverse conclusions: one can hardly stretch evidence or interpretation further than to see running figures as signifying rapid migrations. They are perhaps best disposed of by pointing out that they rest on two basic assumptions: that the artists used colour to represent the actual colours of people or animals, when it is clear that, throughout the art, colour had no illustrative value at all and that every species of animal and all humans could be painted in any of the full range of pigments used by the artists; and second, that the artists shared our own highly Eurocentric colour classifications, in which paler brown skins are arbitrarily codified as 'white' and darker brown skins as 'black'.

Breuil's work in Rhodesia is a sad and cautionary tale of the results of fame, of decades of unchallenged authority leading to dogmatic assertions, derived from cursory examinations, inaccurate copying, complete lack of systematic comparative studies and the isolation of tendentiously selected items from their contexts. Breuil was, however, above all argument and simply dismissed or ignored local prehistorians who disputed his interpretations.[77]

Elizabeth Mannsfeld Goodall

Perhaps the most significant result of Frobenius' visit to Rhodesia was that one of his artists met and fell in love with a local policeman. Elizabeth Mannsfeld was a German art teacher who became interested in ethnography and a research assistant to Frobenius in 1923. She accompanied him to southern Africa at the age of 37. After cataloguing his collection of copies of paintings from the expedition,[78] she returned to Rhodesia in 1931 to marry Leslie Goodall, who was her devoted support in all her future work. She gave the

rest of her life to a study of the local paintings. Over forty years, especially during the years 1940 - 1943, she produced watercolour copies of about 500 paintings ranging from single images to complete records of large panels. She became Honorary Keeper of Rock Paintings at the Queen Victoria Memorial Museum in Salisbury in 1941, a post she held with short breaks until her death in 1971. She felt that the best way she could share her enthusiasm for the art was by making paintings widely accessible through copies. Her main concern was to reproduce their aesthetic qualities. She was happy to adjust compositions to strengthen their effect and to transpose the thick, dry, opaque pigments of the artists into the much more fluid and transparent medium of watercolour. Despite the primitive materials she had to use in tracing and the techniques these imposed on her, her copies succeed in capturing the character of the art in a different medium while retaining accuracy, precision and detail more successfully than any other copyist, copying system or photography. Her accuracy was never absolute - no copyists' ever is - but she very seldom entirely misread an image.[79]

Goodall remained primarily an artist and her response to the art was always essentially aesthetic, typified by her recurrent descriptions of paintings as "fresh", "impulsive", "lively", "impressive", "powerful", "touching", "moving", "vigorous" and "convincing".[80] Goodall had no taste for the robust and often vituperative controversy of much of southern African prehistory where Frobenius' views were misunderstood, dismissed or entirely ignored. She always found difficulty in expressing herself in English and her few papers seem inarticulate, tentative and elliptical. To an academic, her work is almost entirely unsystematic and unanalytical. She developed no theoretical framework or specific research intentions. She remained throughout her life entirely loyal to Frobenius' ideas but did little to develop, expand or adjust them to the new material she was collecting. She continued to classify the art thematically in the categories Frobenius had established when she catalogued his copies.

She followed his sequence of styles. Careful reading makes it clear that she also continued to adhere to Frobenius' conviction that important elements in the art were ancient and exotic. This is revealed in a passing mention, made without qualification and towards the end of her life, that the artists of the "finest early paintings... could have been ancestral to the present day Bushman but it is by no means proven".[81] She never produced any evidence to back this belief: it can only have rested on the authority of Frobenius. Despite her loyalties, she did nothing to tease out the essence of Frobenius' most important contribution to the study of the art as the symbols of a coherent body of beliefs. In her own few attempts at interpretation, she drew not only from Frobenius but from an extraordinarily eclectic range of analogies, some developed to interpret the cave art of Europe, others from Classical mythology, and others from India.

Cranmer K. Cooke

as a young man of 23, C.K. Cooke came from England to Rhodesia in 1929 to join the police force. This gave him the opportunity, on mounted patrols in rural areas, to examine many rock paintings and develop a growing enthusiasm for the art.[82] Although without formal training in archaeology, he subsequently spent a great deal of his spare time in other archaeological fieldwork and excavation of Stone Age sites before he was appointed to the Historical Monuments Commission in 1951, its Honorary Secretary in 1952 and its full-time Director in 1962.[83] When the Commission was amalgamated with the National Museums in 1972, he became Curator of Monuments, Antiquities or Archaeology in several local museums until his final retirement in 1987. Particularly between 1957 and 1969, he was a prolific writer on the prehistoric art of Rhodesia.[84]

Cooke believed that the "art was practised throughout the Late Stone Age" and that "it is almost certain that all of the paintings must have been executed by people... belonging to the same general ethnic and cultural group".[85] His writings leave no doubt that he believed that they were

the work of Bushmen although at the end of his career and feeling under challenge by new work which used San ethnography as a basis for radical reinterpretation, he retreated from this to suggest that the painters might have belonged "to some other group long extinct" and that it was "difficult to believe that there was any connection between these widely separated groups" and recent Bushmen.[86] Cooke, himself an enthusiastic amateur painter and an acquaintance of the archetypal artist-as-Bohemian-genius, Augustus John, had a Romantic and very Eurocentric view of artists and transposed this to the Bushman artist as also "a person somewhat apart", an "experimenter", who "every now and then broke the fetters of convention and allowed free play to his imagination".[87] "Much of art and artistic expression is not conscious thought but an impulse inherent in a comparatively small percentage of the human race... The whole of the realistic [Bushman] art appears to have been based on the simple principle that some people like to paint and have the ability to do so... [It] was in the main 'art for art's sake', an endeavour by the artist to record scenes and events... but more often a scene of beauty remembered for its aesthetic qualities... Most paintings were executed only for pleasure or as a record... The subject matter of all the realistic paintings because they were executed by people of a primitive hunter/gatherer society, is naturally of everyday scenes... The whole art... appears to be based on the simple principle of 'that is a buck' or 'that is a human," or even 'that is a lovely picture'."[88] "I fully believe that most of our paintings are records of actual scenes and happenings."[89] Indeed Cooke believed the imagery was so directly representational that the artists must have generally painted subjects in their sight as they painted, that "visual recording is more likely than even short memory paintings... The painters only painted what they saw and did not in general draw animals from memory."[90]

Cooke, probably more than any other authority, was convinced that in Bushmen, perhaps even more than in other races, artistic skills were innate rather than learned and

that their 'primitiveness' determined how they observed and worked. The basis of their paintings was so simple that they could be fully and immediately comprehended in their totality by anyone of any period or culture - only very few images remained "enigmatic". Cooke allowed for no principles, conventions or canon to the art, for no cultural resonances or allusions, for no elements of metaphor or symbol. The paintings provided a window into the past obscured by only the smallest shadows.

At first Cooke followed Burkitt in seeing the study of the paintings as requiring essentially the same methodology as the study of stone tools and in his first published works he sought once again to establish a sequence of styles but he tried to do this through more precise and carefully defined criteria based primarily on technique.[91]

In subsequent work he was most concerned with 'interpretation', which for him meant solely the correct identification of the objects and activities depicted.[92] The paintings were particularly valuable as a record of different ethnic groups that had lived in Zimbabwe: "The Bushman can hide himself behind a blade of grass and must have observed Iron Age ceremonies while hidden and quite unseen."[93] They also recorded important historical events: thus ten paintings in the Matopos of figures covered by blankets were debated as representing either a record of the first sight of a hitherto unknown practice of some "nomadic group of migrants", "strangers of another ethnic group who were travelling in the country in search of suitable living space, sleeping in the open" or a record of some unusual sickness and therefore possibly bubonic plague.[94] Cooke went a long way towards adopting Breuil's theories of alien migrations. He accepted that not only white figures but all figures with white on them illustrated a single alien group. Some of these figures in the far north-east had enlarged buttocks and thighs, carried only sticks and were herding sheep. They were therefore all taken to represent the first intrusion of nomadic pastoralists - 'Hottentots' - from the north. The route of their migration was plotted from such

paintings, across Rhodesia, through Namibia to the Cape.[95] Though the argument was basically flawed, it reduced Breuil's fantasies to support the sort of migration theories that obsessed many prehistorians at the time.

While Director of the Monuments Commission, Cooke laid particular store on the maintenance and expansion of the Archaeological Survey which sought to record all prehistoric sites in the country. In 1967 - as in 1938 - questionnaires were sent by the Commission to all local administrative officers - 'Native Commissioners' - and all white farmers, asking for details of any prehistoric remains in their areas or on their farms. The quality of the responses was inevitably extremely variable for it is difficult for anyone with only a limited knowledge of the art to assess the relative importance of sites they report. Little of the information could be checked by Monuments or Museum staff. Records in the survey for some commercial farms are reasonably good; areas where an enthusiast for the art lived or worked are often recorded almost comprehensively and in some detail; on the other hand, practically no paintings are recorded in many communal lands except perhaps those in a few large caves, though neighbouring areas are full of paintings. In passing information to the Survey, many amateurs of the art made important contributions. Notable amongst them was H.P.Petie, who visited and recorded many sites over Mashonaland in the 1960s, but his detailed copies and records all left the country with him about 1976. Corona Thornycroft has devoted many years to recording and copying paintings in the Wedza district. Both have published notes on some of their finds.[96]

There are now records of some 4000 painted sites in the Survey but this is an entirely meaningless indicator of the number of sites in the country, given the disparities in the coverage of different areas. The Survey was never considered more than a beginning; no one who knows its history or has some idea of the riches of prehistoric sites in the country would claim that it even began to be comprehensive, precise or fully accurate. It would be foolish to place any reliance

on statistics drawn from it.[97] For many years now, its quality has deteriorated: it appears to have been curated and its information processed by people who seem to have been entirely unfamiliar with the art. Once the Survey passed from Cooke's control, it was repeatedly redesigned to conform to different recording schemes and has now become so muddled, imprecise and uninformative that it is extremely difficult to use.

With the transformation of Rhodesia to the independent state of Zimbabwe, the number of local and expatriate professional archaeologists working in the country has increased more than tenfold and they have been joined by numbers of anthropologists and ethnographers. The National Gallery now also has researchers into the country's art. All this could be expected to result in real advances in rock art studies. At present, this seems most unlikely to happen. Official interest in the Zimbabwean past now appears to be limited entirely to investigations into the origins and development of Shona culture.[98]

The wider scene

Until the late 1950s, Rhodesia had no research institutions outside the museums concerned with the humanities, no University, no public art galleries, no specialist journals or publications, nowhere where critical appraisal by one's peers was possible; and though new institutions then made it theoretically possible, it remained in practice entirely lacking. Rhodesia simply never had the necessary numbers or calibre of scholars to establish or sustain intellectual endeavours of this sort on its own. It is therefore not enough to trace the history of local investigations: they must be set in a wider context and their sources sought.

As by far the most prolific and sustained contributor to the study of the paintings, Cooke's opinions carried unrivalled authority and moulded the way the art was understood for a generation and more. They were however essentially eclectic, derived not from analytical study of the paintings as much as from authorities working in other countries. His earlier work was based on Burkitt's view of

the paintings as an integral part of Stone Age archaeology. Breuil's influence is apparent in his concern with illustrations of alien migrations in the paintings.[99] In later years, he looked to South Africa for the academic exchanges, debates, conferences and ideas that would stimulate his work.[100]

South African writers in their turn all treated - and still treat - the paintings of Zimbabwe as a minor extension of the paintings further south. Though few have ever seen a painting in Zimbabwe, they too often include 'southern Africa' in the titles of their works and claim that their studies cover the art of the whole region. They do not recognise even the possibility that the art of Zimbabwe may be significantly different from the art further south. The intellectual domination exerted by South Africans on Rhodesian research was even more damaging than the influence of those foreign researchers who had actually worked in the country, however briefly.

In South Africa, the basic approach to the art was determined for generations by a single review written over 80 years ago by the British art critic Roger Fry, of one of the first well-illustrated books on Bushman art.[101] Fry accepted that the art was produced by "the lowest of savages" but added his own gloss to this and posited that, precisely because of their place on the evolutionary scale, Bushmen were "endowed" with "a perfection of vision". Because "mental concepts did not interfere with their perceptions", they had a "peculiar power of visualization" in which "the retinal image passed into a clear memory picture with scarcely any intervening mental process". Because nothing was schematised or conventionalised, the artists rendered their subjects with "apparent certainty and striking verisimilitude". The artists were able to show people and animals in most difficult and complicated attitudes; to arrest movement with an accuracy "seen by us to be true only because our slow and impaired vision has been helped out by instantaneous photography": to compose crowd scenes "in all their confusion and indeterminate variety". The results were

utterly unlike any other art, be it child art, "primitive art", the art of ancient Egypt, Greece or Assyria, for these all had a conceptual basis and origin.

In South Africa from 1956, a new generation of enthusiasts began to publish many lavish books of coloured photographs of South African paintings.[102] All the authors came from outside the established academic communities. None of them had any of the formal training or sustained contact with anthropology, art history or archaeology that would bring them into the mainstream of academic research. They were not familiar with any of the normal and ordinary procedures of iconographic comparison or analysis, or of the logic of theory building, testing or explanation. Though they were prolific and all received honours, awards and office from many local and overseas learned societies for their work, they nevertheless formed within prehistoric studies an isolated interpretative community, distinct in discourse, distinct in the content, form, level of expression and vehicles for publication. Their small community was intellectually inbred and isolated from all the developments in the analysis of art or of artistic, perceptual or conceptual systems. Their interpretations depended on assertion and personal authority, not investigation. They fed incestuously on each other's work and paraphrased and endlessly reproduced the same tiny body of conjecture, much of it based on ideas about the nature of art, the function of artists in society, the nature of representation and the motivations underlying prehistoric art developed in Europe at the turn of the century and long rejected in their homelands.[103]

The quality of the work varied. A.R. Willcox appears the most sober, rational and objective of this group and seems to have been Cooke's closest and most influential colleague. His work is all firmly based on Fry's review: under challenge he has produced increasingly elaborate glosses on it but remains entirely committed to every detail of it, changing nothing.[104] He repeats that the Bushmen had specific racial characteristics including an "innate

artistic ability", extraordinary power and acuity of vision, the ability to perceive what can otherwise only be recorded with a high speed camera and the ability found, it is claimed, in many children, to recall what they had seen in total photographic detail.[105] They painted because it was in their nature to do so, because they had to. They also had the opportunity: they had a great deal of time to spare for they lived in a rich habitat with plentiful game and wild foods. To fill this leisure time happily, they painted. More explicitly, artists found pleasure in recalling happy and exciting incidents they had just experienced in paint, in trying to capture the beauty of their prey and their surroundings. They painted primarily for the enjoyment it gave them: the creative act in itself was "self-rewarding"; the admiration given them by those who watched them at work and saw the results brought further encouragement and satisfaction. The conscious sense of one's own developing skills and gradual mastery of a craft are primary and basic human pleasures. Paintings enabled artists and audience to recreate and relive the delights of a life "lived in splendid health to a great age in a manner satisfying to every human instinct and had surplus energy to practise the arts of mime, dancing, music, story-telling, engraving and painting".[106] Paintings were created simply for their own sake, for the pleasure they gave and very little more. They could only be realistic illustrations of the objects and activities of everyday life, reproduced with as much accuracy as the artists were capable. They were the artists' direct responses to their surroundings. Artists painted "what they had seen" and what they wanted "to see again". Thus amongst animals they painted their "favourite quarry", their "dream kill".[107] The paintings of eland that dominate the art of the Drakensberg in numbers, size, skill of execution and beauty were an "aesthetic response" to an animal that is "a noble-looking beast in its size and carriage".[108] They did not paint the wildebeest because it lived in the plains and the artists worked in the mountains. They seldom painted the warthog simply because it was ugly.[109] From the beginning,

Willcox aimed to "recapture the fresh clear vision of the Bushman, escaping temporarily from the thraldom of the concept which blurs our modern vision" and with them to "look at the world directly and not through the half-opaque medium of concepts".[110]

Such views are still widely disseminated, popular and vehemently held. The worst aspects of them are epitomised by the works of H.C. 'Bert' Woodhouse. His commitment to the banal, the superficial, the seemingly obvious and the literal in his interpretations is unrelenting.[111] For him, the paintings are so little modified by thought, reason, culture, ideology or aesthetics that they even fall below the photographs in yesterday's newspaper and become a prehistoric equivalent to the snapshots in Granny's family album. Stories are invented and attached to every scene, creating an extraordinary world of feasting, drunkenness, infidelity, adultery, abduction and murder, of target practice and clay pigeon shooting, making pets of orphaned buck, jazz sessions and "old-hat" and "way-out" dance steps, of "dressy" or "immaculately cut" clothes, where "help is needed with zippers and poppers", where "young bloods let off steam" and enemas are "administered to apprehensive 'patients'".[112] With a complete lack of self-awareness, Woodhouse explores the ethos of white lower middle-class Johannesburg through San paintings and establishes their content from this perspective. Above all, nothing is allowed to interfere with his arch, tongue-in-cheek trivialising of the art and patronising of the artists as simple, childlike folk having fun on the rocks: the implicit, smug, complacent racism - perhaps even in part subconscious, so deeply pervasive and ingrained is it - that underpins apartheid. There can be no better or more salutary object-lesson in the dangers of interpretation untrammelled by any coherent theoretical base than this.

Though Woodhouse's work is ignored or rejected by anyone with any concern for any form of objective analysis, including Cooke and Willcox, one of his few followers is Goodall's recently-appointed successor as Curator of Rock Art

in Zimbabwe, Peter Genge, who adopts the same approach with equally dispiriting and retrograde results, even if these are fortunately less public, prolific or influential.[113]

Conclusion

Neville Jones, Rhodesia's first archaeologist, summed up his views on rock art studies after his retirement in 1949: "The subject is a big one and bristles with problems... It can be approached from the standpoint of the artist who naturally looks at it from the aesthetic angle;... from that of the ethnologist who seeks data connected with native custom and raiment, and looks for what evidence he can find for the working of the native mind; and from that of the prehistorian whose main concern is with the cultural association of the paintings and their correct sequence."[114]

This is a fair summary for the time. Goodall favoured the first approach though she wrote nothing on it. Cooke moved from the third to the second. Other approaches have been entirely ignored. In Rhodesia, anthropology was always a Cinderella subject. If it was thought about at all, in settler eyes it was deeply suspect: its recognition of the strength, coherence and autonomy of indigenous societies disturbed settler perceptions of the local people as an empty canvas to be filled with their own designs, as formless clay to be moulded to their purposes. As a consequence, no one in Rhodesia seems even to have been aware of the contributions anthropology could make to an understanding of the structure of San belief, thought and perception that underlies the art. The concerns and methods of art history were and remain if anything even more completely unknown.

NOTES

1. Bent, 1893: 333.

2. For instance, Cooke, 1969: 25, 30, suggests that there may have been a "convention forbidding recognizable portraits" because "they might have provided an ill-wisher with a means for sympathetic magic... as were wax images in medieval Europe".

3. Molyneux, 1903.

4. White, 1905.

5. Mennell and Chubb, 1908.

6. Hall, 1911: 55-61.

7. Hall, 1912: 147-8.

8. Hall, 1914.

9. Hall, 1914: Introduction.

10. Hall, 1914: 43.

11. Hall, 1914: Ch.4: Sites 19 and 44.

12. Hall, 1912: 144, 148.

13. Hall, 1914: 26.

14. Arnold and Jones, 1919.

15. Letter from Jones to Goodwin, 18 April 1934, in HA 7/3/2/2.

16. Cripps, Diaries: see Bibliography for details of these unpublished volumes.

17. Cripps, L., Copies of rock paintings, 14 Vols, now held in the Archaeological Survey Department of the Queen Victoria Memorial Museum, Harare. Each volume consists of several sketching pads bound together by Cripps himself. Only the first eleven volumes contain copies; the other three hold photographs, newspaper cuttings and re-copies of earlier tracings. Cooke, 1958 and 1964a, are in large part based on Cripps' copies.

18. Cooke, 1991: 3, claims these were added after Cripps death by his wife. From what I was told in the 1960's, I doubt this. Sadly they have now almost all been removed.

19. Cripps, Diary, Vol.1: 787. The practice of exhibiting caged Bushmen at international exhibitions in South Africa continued at least until 1952, when I saw such an exhibit at the van Riebeeck Tercentenary Festival Exhibition in Cape Town.

20. Cripps, Diary, Vol.3: 438.

21. Cripps, 1941a, 1941b, 1941c, 1942.

22. Cripps, Copies of rock paintings, Vol.13.

23. Cripps, 1941b: 345.

24. Cripps, 1941b: 347.

25. Cripps, Diary, Vol.3: 439-40, extracted from information sent to C. van Riet Lowe, Director of the South African Bureau of Archaeology.

26. Cripps, Diary, Vol.3: 1367.

27. Cripps, 1941a: 35. Frobenius had earlier reached a similar conclusion and Cripps was aware of Frobenius and his work though he had probably read little or any of it himself. However this may be, Cripps reads as if his interpretations are based entirely on his own copies and were not influenced by Frobenius.

28. Findlay, 1987.

29. Impey, 1926: 88.

30. Bulawayo Chronicle Weekly Supplement, 30 April 1927: 1.

31. Bulawayo Chronicle, 2 July 1927: 11.

32. Bleek, D., 1927.

33. Taylor, 1927.

34. Different aspects of Burkitt's tour are discussed in Schrire et al., 1986, and Shaw, 1991.

35. Daniel, 1986: 65-67.

36. Houghton Brodrick, 1963: 150-151.

37. The subsequent history of these paintings - except for those at Nswatugi - is a sad one. Domboshawa has now suffered the ravages of generations of vandals and from vigorous cleaning necessary to remove their graffiti, while the paintings at Makumbe, probably the finest and most extensive in the country, have been entirely destroyed recently by the pupils of the nearby Roman Catholic Mission with lewd graffiti recording orgies of sex, alcohol and vandalism that appear to be a regular feature of that school's year. The Quarry paintings were soon dynamited for gravel. The Glen Norah paintings survive beside a suburb of workers' housing. They have not yet been vandalised, though clearly in grave danger: the group of rocks that they are in is variously used as a craft workshop, latrine, rubbish dump and Rastafarian garden, with all the boulders around the paintings daubed with their slogans. The site of the Allendale paintings has been lost for decades.

38. Burkitt, 1928: 111.

39. Burkitt, 1928: 110, 156.

40. Burkitt, 1928: 112.

41. Armstrong, 1931.

42. Jones, 1949: Ch.5.

43. Jones, 1940.

44. Schulz, 1932: 15.

45. Frobenius, 1931b: Book I: 11-34.

46. Frobenius, 1931a: 27; 1931b: Book II: 11-12, 22.

47. Frobenius, 1931a: 29-30; 1931b: Book I: 11-34; Book II: 40. Some of the latter work and reproductions from it are more accessible in Striedter, ed., 1983.

48. Frobenius, 1931b: Book II: 40.

49. Frobenius, 1931b: Book II: 40-1.

50. Frobenius, 1931a: 29-30; 1931b: Book II: 28-32.

51. Frobenius, 1931b: Book I: 33.

52. Frobenius, 1931c.

53. Brentjies, 1969; all of Holm's work, exemplified by his latest - Holm, 1987; and even elements in Pager, especially 1975a, are examples.

54. van Riet Lowe, C.J. quoted in Mason, 1989: 23-4.

55. Debates in the House of Assembly, Cape Town, 24 February 1930, reproduced in Mason, 1989: 93-105.

56. Willcox, 1984: 139.

57. Breuil, 1931: 108.

58. Breuil, 1931: 108-9,

59. Breuil, 1931: 109.

60. Houghton Brodrick, 1963: 215.

61. Breuil, 1955: 15.

62. Breuil, 1955: 14.

63. Breuil, 1960: 3.

64. Breuil, letter of November, 1948, in Houghton Brodrick, 1963: 208.

65. Breuil, 1960: 3.

66. Breuil, letter of November, 1948, in Houghton Brodrick, 1963: 209.

67. Breuil, 1952: 9-10.

68. Breuil, 1948: 8-9.

69. Breuil, 1949a: 27.

70. Breuil, 1955, 1957, 1959, 1960, 1975.

71. Breuil, 1955: 9.

72. Breuil, 1955: 12.

73. Houghton Brodrick, 1963: 206; Breuil, 1966: 4.

74. Breuil, 1955: 16-7.

75. Breuil, 1966: 8-9.

76. Breuil, 1966: 7, repeated on 118.

77. Robinson, 1949.

78. Mannsfeld, 1930.

79. Compare Goodall, 1957, Pl.VI, No.4, with **Fig.9.29 below** for a rare example of an inventive misreading of a painting by her.

80. Goodall, 1959: 14, 44.

81. Goodall, 1970: 93.

82. Cooke, 1964d: 2. In Cooke, 1991: 2, he claims to have taken Frobenius and Goodall to paintings in the Marondera and Wedza Districts during their expedition. This seems impossible, given that when they left the country in May, 1929, Cooke can only have been in the Police a maximum of five months and most or all of this time must have been spent in training prior to any rural posting, allowing no time for him to have yet located any paintings. Frobenius, 1931c: 8, makes no mention of him in his lengthy acknowledgements, apparently of all those who assisted him in Rhodesia. Cooke, in Cooke, 1969: 24, claims only "thirty years of study".

83. Much of the material in Chapter 2 is derived from Cooke's work: see Cooke, 1963a, 1971a and 1979.

84. Cooke summarised his work in one of his last publications on the art: 1969.

85. Cooke, 1969: 143, 30.

86. Cooke, 1983: 538.

87. Cooke, 1969: 25, 26.

88. Cooke, 1969: 26, 149-50, 27, 74.

89. Cooke, 1964d: 3.

90. Cooke, 1964d: 14, 20.

91. Cooke, 1957 and 1959: 124-33. In this work, I only consider paintings that belong to his Styles 1 to 4. His Style 5, "crude paintings done mainly in white and charcoal" and "painted by dipping the fingers in paint and using them instead of a brush", as he says, "do not, in all probability belong to people living in the Stone Age" and "represent a very definite break in continuity" (1969: 49). They are in fact little more than modern or near-modern graffiti. He later added a Style 6 to his sequence - "outlines [of earlier paintings] filled with clay plaster" (1969: 50, 62). These additions too are near-recent vandalism and have nothing to do with the art under discussion.

92. Cooke, 1968.

93. Cooke, 1965a: 18.

94. Cooke, 1964e: 1-3.

95. Cooke, 1965d.

96. Petie, 1969a, 1969b, 1970, 1971, 1974, 1975; Thornycroft, 1974, 1978, 1986a, 1988, 1989.

97. See Woodhouse, 1990, for one example of the misuse of these records.

98. The continued refusal of some professional archaeologists to enter the field of rock art research, even a generation after it was demonstrated to be capable of producing sound and rewarding results, is painfully apparent in a very recent publication of the Queen Victoria [Memorial] Museum of Zimbabwe by one of its senior professional archaeologists: Adams, 1991. This is no more than a plagiarisation of Garlake, 1987 with all attempts at interpretation omitted. Descriptions of paintings at specific sites are reduced to giving precise dimensions of the total overall area of paintings and no more! In what is intended as a popular educational handbook, data can scarcely come rawer than this or abdication of professional engagement be more apparent.

99. Cooke, 1965d.

100. This situation has not changed: I also work in total intellectual isolation within Zimbabwe and South African studies have also provided the main stimulus for my work.

101. Fry, 1910, reprinted as 'The art of the Bushmen' in Fry, 1940: 76-87, reviewing Tongue, 1909. The last phrases in Cooke's definitive book on the art, which sums it up finally, rather flatly and cryptically as "the only prehistoric art which had developed perspective and depicted true leg movement", is a garbled adaptation of Fry: Cooke, 1969: 154.

102. Willcox, 1956, 1963, 1984a, 1986; Lee and Woodhouse, 1970; Woodhouse, 1979, 1984a.

103. Damning critiques of their work began with Vinnicombe, 1972a. Lewis-Williams has repeatedly and somewhat repetitively attacked their approach in Lewis-Williams, 1983b, 1984a, 1984c, (with Loubser) 1986, and 1987d.

104. Willcox, 1984b.

105. Willcox, 1978b.

106. Willcox, 1956: 21.

107. Willcox, 1987: 171.

108. Willcox, 1983: 539; 1987: 171.

109. Willcox, 1978b: 59-60; 1987: 171.

110. Willcox, 1956: iv.

111. See Bibliography for references to his work; see especially Lee and Woodhouse, 1970; Woodhouse, 1979 and 1984a.

112. Lee and Woodhouse, 1970: 67, 68, 55, 106, 79, 106; Woodhouse, 1979: 62.

113. See Genge, 1983, 1988a, 1988b and his regular contributions to the Prehistory of Zimbabwe Newsletter from 1985.

114. Jones, 1949: 59.

4. THEORETICAL ADVANCES

Prehistorians and quantitative analyses

Despite the many aberrations described at the end of the last chapter, it is still to South Africa that researchers in Zimbabwe must look for their stimuli in investigating the rock paintings of Zimbabwe. However, this now makes more sense for recent advances in research there have achieved and merited international respect. For many years, doubts about the worth of entirely personal responses to paintings, disguised as common-sense empirical pragmatism, deterred professional prehistorians in South Africa from any attempts to study them. The speculative work exemplified by that of Cooke, Willcox and Woodhouse was clearly without coherence, system or theoretical basis. It was, to anyone trained to value some sort of scientific rigour, almost entirely worthless. Yet prehistorians had nothing to substitute, no conceptual apparatus, no theoretical framework and no methodology that they could envisage which would penetrate the significance of the art. New approaches came from outside the profession.

In the 1960s, influenced by the advances in archaeological thought and method that were to result in the 'New Archaeology', some South African archaeologists turned to statistical analyses as at least a way of making "an objective assessment of the art", "presenting information in an objective and numerical form so that it may be directly compared" with analyses by other workers.[1] The first such work examined a sample of paintings in the Western Cape with two specific, clearly defined, limited and apparently attainable objectives: first, to determine the dimensions of handprints on the rock surfaces and compare these with the size of the hands of modern San to help establish the authorship of the paintings and, second, to count the numbers of figures in painted groups to obtain some insight into "group size and change in group structure".[2]

Subsequently, Harald Pager, Patricia Vinnicombe and David Lewis-Williams, none of them with any formal training

in prehistory or archaeology, carried out four major surveys in which they counted and recorded every painting in a large proportion of the sites in selected areas of the Drakensberg. Every individual image was defined by a more or less standardised set of attributes covering subject, size and colour. Human figures were described by attitude, action, stance, head shape, dress and equipment. Animals were identified by species and there were separate categories for "supernatural creatures" and inanimate objects such as bags or weapons. In each survey well over a thousand images were analysed. The size of the samples, the amount of data recorded and the quality of many of the copies made were all impressive.

Their work has been emulated on a much smaller scale and with much less rigour in two surveys in Zimbabwe. M.R. Tucker led a team of the local Prehistory Society in a survey of a 20km by 20km area of commercial farmlands west of Harare in 1974-6, copying some of the paintings, recording the rest and compiling counts of the animal species and some of the attributes of the human figures.[3] It suffered from incompleteness, inaccurate identifications and extraordinarily poor copying.[4] Thornycroft has begun a similar analysis of the paintings in the Wedza district.[5] A survey of paintings in the Matopo Hills by Walker formed part of a prolonged study of the Stone Age ecology of the area. It remains unpublished save for a brief note on some conclusions on phases of paintings, defined by size, colour, technique and favoured subjects.[6]

However, in all these surveys, the accumulation of numerical data as an entry to interpretation was inappropriate and inadequate. There was the logical problem of interpreting a body of data gathered without preliminary thought or definition of the particular problems it was to address. There was the continuing problem of subjectivity, particularly in the selection of what attributes were significant from the great many that could have been chosen to define an image. Most importantly, the relationships between images were ignored. The associations of each image

and the contexts within which each image was located were not recorded - information essential to the full understanding of any image, yet almost impossible to define, quantify or compute.[7]

Harald Pager

Between 1967 and 1969, Harald Pager copied 3909 paintings at 17 sites in the Ndedema Gorge, photographing every painted surface, having the photographs enlarged to life-size and then copying every image in colour in oil paints onto them. He also catalogued every image, using as complete and as standardised a range of attributes as he could devise. Sponsored by the University of Cologne, between 1977 and his death in 1985, he copied and catalogued almost all the paintings in 19 of the 21 drainage systems of the Brandberg in Namibia, tracing over 43 000 images at 879 sites. Every site in both surveys was also planned and the positions of each sheet of tracings precisely located on the plans. In the Brandberg he used pencil and transparent foil because of "logistic problems" and because few paintings had the delicate grading of colours of Ndedema.[8] Pager's paintings and drawings are astonishing achievements, given their comprehensiveness, meticulous accuracy and detail - which includes every blemish and exfoliation scar: work that any copyist will recognise as having entailed great physical hardship and demanded energy, dedication and sustained concentration that will almost certainly never be equalled.[9]

His aim in these volumes was to come as close as possible to a complete and objective record of the art, leaving interpretation until later or to others. Interpretation does however find its way into Pager's often extensive captions to paintings in both Ndedema and Amis Gorge, though these, particularly in the second volume, are clearly incomplete personal notes, not intended to be taken very seriously. They display a fundamental flaw in their failure to distinguish between what is actually represented and what can be read into the representations: to take a simple example, the caption to a painting of a gatherer [10] -

"carrying home a load of fruit she collected in the field" - mixes facts, inferences and personal speculation quite uncritically: of the seven operative words, three - carrying, load, she - describe visible facts, one - collected - a reasonable inference, and three - home, fruit, field - are pure imagination. There is also a determination to see every painting as a realistic record despite contrary evidence: crawling human figures on an animal's neck are said to represent a "hunting ritual"[11] - one of Pager's favourite concepts - though their comparative sizes - the animal is well over ten times as large as the humans - immediately rules out any possibility of realistic illustration. The captions reveal how interpretations based on the closest familiarity with a very considerable corpus of paintings can, without some theoretical foundation, become as undisciplined and subjective, and occasionally as arch, trite and silly as those of Woodhouse: again we have "a non-conformist who prefers idleness" or another "carrying a bag with 'golf' clubs" or a scene which "shows how the hunter kills one of the baboons [with] a pugilistic uppercut".[12]

Pager considered that his work at Ndedema "demonstrates clearly that no relationship exists between the frequency of depiction and the artist's contact with a wealth of common subject matter. Otherwise, one would have to conclude that the artists lived in a world where women were scarce, children and small animals few and plants non-existent." However he was also satisfied that frequencies of images did bear directly on significance: "the whole system... emerges clearly enough... First comes the male with all his gear and decor, then comes his activities, in this case hunting big game. His woman appears in third place only, and there is a total disregard for her realm of children and plants."[13] He could go little further than these rather banal superficialities: his only general interpretative judgments were that "Narration is hardly the purpose of the art and a record of daily life not at all" and "Naturalistic appearance was almost invariably sacrificed in favour of the depictions of basic concepts and essentials."[14]

Pager's most sustained attempt at explaining the art is his Stone Age Myth and Magic. Underlying prejudice against any possibility of conceptual complexity in the imagery were revealed in claims like "Recent psychological tests have given no indication of any mental shortcomings in Bushmen except perhaps in the domain of conceptual-abstract reasoning" and his dismissal of San "rainmakers" as sly charlatans.[15] His reaction to the art was one of emotional enthusiasm rather than any objective analytical detachment as he celebrated the paintings as "an immense source of information on the lives of Stone Age hunters... an ancient pictorial encyclopedia".[16] Some "immortalize the long forgotten ceremonies, beliefs and myths" while others depict "a world of fantasy".[17] He did not rule out any of the popular interpretations of the art. All might be valid and co-exist: "Little can be said against the assumption that the cavalcade of animals painted on the rock faces represented a kind of menu card."[18] "A honey hunter climbs a ladder. This could be a piece of journalism, a visual aid for instruction, an iconograph of wishful thinking or a token of thanksgiving to the bees."[19] He personally particularly favoured "some sort of religious basis for the art" and believed the paintings were "the accessories to magico-religious practices", the "visual expression of a religious system" and, because there were many signs of occupation below them, "might have been accredited with magico-religious efficacy ... and the protection of living sites".[20] He believed that "antelope dominated the religious thoughts of the rock painters", that there had been an "antelope cult" and there was the "distinct probability that some animals were considered sacred and were depicted for purposes of divination".[21] "The animal was revered and man could not consider himself the master of this world."[22] In the end, Pager retreated even further into the nebulous, subjective mystification of the art that has characterised the worst of German writing of on the subject: his concluding sentence is "The quintessence revealed by now is clearly the cosmic bond that had connected men and animals in a world that had not

yet lost its balance."[23]

Pager was simply unable to link or correlate the mass of visual imagery he had collected with any sustained theory on which to base interpretation, unable to discriminate or compare, to attempt to demonstrate significance or structure or system except on the most superficial level, to formulate hypotheses or use his material to test them. His quantitative analyses remain suspended in a theoretical vacuum and their usefulness has yet to be demonstrated.[24]

Patricia Vinnicombe

Vinnicombe spent many years studying the paintings of the Underberg, a small area of the southern foothills of the Drakensberg and her home.[25] She recorded 8478 images at 150 sites of the 308 she located and was the first to define systematically what she considered the significant attributes of each image and compile tables of their frequencies.[26] "It should be stressed that the recording of the paintings and subsequent analysis of the data was carried through without preconceived ideas on the interpretation of the material. Admittedly I was influenced by, and tended to accept without question the current views... As the analysis progressed, however... I grew increasingly conscious of the limitations and inadequacy of the essentially practical approach to interpretation",[27] which she exemplified with quotes from Cooke and Willcox and now criticised vigorously in reviews.[28]

At first, she took the paintings as generally straightforward illustrations and many of her interpretations were little different from those of the popular writers who were her contemporaries. Lines or shapes on people's heads might be "spare arrows in a headband, tufts of grass worn as a camouflage, porcupine quills thrust into the hair for decorative purposes" or "bladders attached to the hair".[29] Curved tusk-like lines from the face "could represent pieces of wood or porcupine quill worn through the cartilage of the nose [though] they are more likely to have a mythological explanation".[30] A line across a penis, "occasionally decorated with a tassel or similar ornament hanging from a

cord" and apparently associated with "men carrying hunting equipment", might illustrate the clips applied by Bantu-speaking young men prior to circumcision. However she went on to add that it might "have a sexual or psychological significance... it could denote a temporary taboo on intercourse or urination in connection with hunting practice... symbolise a prohibition rather than depict an actual practice, and this, in my view, is the most plausible explanation" and she quoted Kung, Heikum and Cape San hunting taboos to support this.[31]

Vinnicombe's main aim was to try to find correspondences between paintings and San practice and belief: the first person to do so with any consistency. Her interpretations developed as her work progressed and the process is reflected with great honesty in her final work. After more than 15 years work and towards the end of her research, Vinnicombe was awarded a Research Fellowship at Clare Hall, Cambridge, which gave her "the opportunity to discuss a wide spectrum of problems with scholars and specialists from many fields" and exposed her for the first time to anthropological theory.[32] She now recognized much more clearly that the paintings as a whole were not simply representational. "They are not a realistic reflection of the daily pursuits or environment of the Bushman... subjects which were commonplace but essential components of the lives of the Bushmen are excluded... The artists were not imitating nature, but were selecting patterns or basic formulae from nature which they repeated time after time."[33] "The selective, conventionalised, repetitive nature of the subject matter" revealed by her analyses was clear, striking and sufficient to convince her that "the Bushmen did not paint simply what they saw but selected what was symbolically important to them. From this followed the realization that the numerical analysis of the paintings could be regarded as an ideological structure which reflected a set of values."[34] Confirmation of this was the way that "bows and arrows... are shown more frequently as a technological adjunct rather than a weapon of the chase... Digging sticks... are represented more as an abstract symbol

of food-gathering than as a practical instrument for digging."[35] "The connection between hunting and male prestige... is suggested by the simple means of visually associating hunting weapons with male sexuality."[36]

She then felt able to suggest interpretations of paintings as symbols. "The importance of co-ordination and co-operation is... expressed in group compositions... Fear, anxiety, disruption, aggression and hostility appear to be symbolised by the larger carnivores, lions and leopards. Winged creatures are the intermediary between human beings and the supernatural, between earth and sky. Serpents, among a host of other attributes, symbolise regeneration, and regeneration is in turn linked with water. The absence of wildebeeste, zebra and ostriches, animals which consort together, may be associated with social avoidances which are directed towards certain categories of kin... Therianthropic figures [images conflating human and animal elements] embody relationships between man and animals... The eland epitomised more than the regulated unity of the Bushman band: it served as a link between the material and spiritual worlds."[37]

The problem with all this was that it was based on generalizations derived from numerical analyses rather than detailed comparative study of individual images; the integration of image, symbol and belief was largely abstract, theoretical and indirect, with little or no detailed, precise or specific iconographic demonstration of its validity. Her interpretations consequently have strong subjective and hence Eurocentric elements. They were criticised immediately by Willcox[38] and later and indirectly by Lewis-Williams as we shall see below. Her new insights had been developed too late for Vinnicombe to develop the coherent conceptual framework, ideas, techniques and vocabulary that would enable her to explore the paintings systematically with her new understanding, to test, evaluate and demonstrate the validity of her final stance in detail. Her work ended with "preliminary, tentative and incomplete hypotheses" and the sketchy outlines of "concepts [she] was struggling to formulate and express".[39] Vinnicombe had however done

enough to alter fundamentally the course of the study of rock paintings once she recognized and demonstrated that it was possible "to correlate at least some aspects of the art with the Bushman's way of thinking".[40]

David Lewis-Williams

David Lewis-Williams was a teacher of English literature when he began to study rock paintings in the Natal Drakensberg in 1968. This work was developed into a doctoral thesis presented in the Department of Social Anthropology of the University of Natal in 1978 and published as Believing and Seeing in 1981. In 1980 he joined the Department of Archaeology of the University of the Witwatersrand - the first and probably still the only post in any academic or research institution in Africa specifically designed to promote teaching or research on rock paintings - marking the qualitative change in perceptions of the art, its worth and the potential for its understanding, that had resulted from his work. He was appointed to a professorship in Cognitive Archaeology in the Department in 1987, when he also founded a Rock Art Research Unit which he continues to direct. In the last twenty years, no one has had a greater influence on rock art studies in southern Africa and this influence now extends well beyond Africa.

Implicit in all Lewis-Williams' work and made explicit in his Inaugural Address celebrating his professorship, is a very different perception of the San and their paintings from that of the white South African public and those who pander to it in their writings. "I do not for one moment believe that San art is in any way less complex, less intellectual than, say, Italian quattrocento art. Its symbolism is as subtle, its concepts as recondite, its aesthetics as striking... The drama of San art is no less arresting than the drama of [Leonardo da Vinci's] Last Supper."[41] "The work of the Italian Renaissance painters and sculptors, the Flemish masters and the French Impressionists is no more 'advanced' or intricate than Bushman rock art."[42] His comparisons may be strained and there should be no need to set such alien standards - San art is well able to stand on

its own merits - but the sentiment is clear.

Lewis-Williams addresses what he sees as "the most intractable challenge that faces our profession [of archaeology]" [43]: the recovery of the "significance" and "meaning" of the art [44] and the discovery of "mental processes... what went on in the minds of the people who made what is arguably the world's greatest rock art".[45] The art "communicated ideas and values central to San thought" and his aim was "to adopt a model of the way in which the paintings communicated" these,[46] "to uncover the principles informing the art... the very nature of the articulation between the art and San thought".[47]

First one had to "understand the content" of the art. One "cannot make useful statements about the meaning of the art without preliminary quantification",[48] derived from "records of all the paintings in a limited geographical area; or... a valid sample".[49] "Selection" or "eclectic sampling" introduced a "fatal... degree of distortion".[50] Lewis-Williams' own work was based on surveys he carried out from 1968 in the Ncibidwane valley in the Natal Drakensberg [51], where he recorded 1335 images at 20 sites, and from 1972 in the Kraai and Bell river valleys in the Drakensberg of Barkly East in the eastern Cape, where he recorded 2361 images in 38 shelters.[52]

The most novel and important result of the analysis of this material was a conclusive demonstration that the superpositioning of different images was not random, but ordered according to a system that had nothing to do with scenic illustration. This suggested to him that the art was a form of "language" with its own "syntax". "The art is an expression of the structure of Bushman thought... according to rules peculiar to itself... Painting spawns a proliferating series of structures, a fact which accounts for the restricted and repetitive nature of the art...a theoretically infinite number of versions of the same set of themes."[53] Images were graphic symbols that were manipulated "in a prescribed way to make statements in a world of ideas. Images were the tangible objects in

conceptual thought". The images "illuminated an interior world as well as illustrated an external one". Superpositions were "symbol clusters", " a means of making a value statement", "iconographic signifiers... to emphasise a portion of the semantic spectrum" and "to make statements about important issues".[54]

Because the art was a system, it had regularities. What an image signified was determined by the context in which that image was placed and hence it was altered by its relationships with other images. Hence it is these relationships which are the true signifiers, the true units of the construction of meaning and should be the units of analysis. Relationships were used to make carefully controlled statements. They did this through a culturally controlled association of ideas. In different contexts, for instance, the image of the eland could make statements about sex, mating, fertility, the unity of the human group, aspects of social relations, trance and the trancer. Its meaning derived from contexts, associations and relationships, the position of the symbol in the symbol cluster. This made quantitative analyses immensely more difficult for they could contribute little in themselves to establishing significance and could even be dismissed as the "counting of trivia". (Thoreau had long before put it another way: "It is not worth it to go round the world to count the cats in Zanzibar".)

"Meaning" could only be derived from within the societies of the artists, from what people in these societies said about the paintings and how they used them. "Semantics" could only be based on "exegesis": "explanations offered by indigenous informants".[55] "Without a verbal commentary of some sort it is impossible to know the meaning intended by a painter... some explanatory accompaniment is essential for unambiguous interpretation."[56] On this he has been insistent. "Rock paintings, like any other pictures, remain unintelligible without some verbal commentary, for, unaided visual images lack the power to communicate unambiguously."[57] "Expectations of learning about San material culture and beliefs from the art alone are too

sanguine... It is clearly wrong to suppose that the art speaks directly to Western viewers... No art communicates as directly as this... Where there is no ethnographic evidence for an artefact or practice, let alone a belief, over and above apparent depiction in the art, the hallucinatory and symbolic nature of many paintings precludes inference..."[58] "It is now impossible to suppose that we can confidently infer much from the art that we do not already know from the ethnography."[59] Lewis-Williams believes internal inferential analysis, such as discovery of an inherent order and induction of meaning from such order, to be an impasse. The usual alternative, simplistic ethnographic analogy, is as much to be avoided.[60]

Lewis-Williams was unusually fortunate. The paintings he was studying were, he considered, only two to three hundred years old at most, and those in his Eastern Cape survey were very close to or included paintings that, in 1873, had been shown to a visiting magistrate, Joseph Orpen, by a local Maluti San guide clearly familiar with them, Qing. Orpen made copies of some of them and published these with Qing's interpretations.[61] The copies passed to the philologist Wilhelm Bleek, who showed Orpen's copies to one of his Xam San informants, Diakwain; and his opinions are also recorded.[62] Lewis-Williams has shown how Qing, in what had always seemed an opaque and impenetrable account, interpreted these particular paintings through common San metaphors for San trancing and how his and Diakwain's interpretations matched closely.[63] Thus, for his exegesis, Lewis Williams could use not only information from a local San near-contemporary of the artists but also the much larger body of information on San Xam beliefs and folk lore recorded by Wilhelm Bleek and his sister-in-law, Lucy Lloyd, and published in part by his daughter, Dorothea.[64] Later he found that there were also "some unexpected conceptual parallels between the Kung [a northern Kalahari San group recently intensively studied] and the southern San", that they "share[d] a common 'cognitive' culture" and that "more and more points of similarity between southern and Kung

beliefs became apparent".[65] Kung material therefore could also be used in exegesis. Lewis-Williams "experienced a creative two-way exegetical process... a process of discovery... The art and the ethnography are complementary expressions of a single belief system [and when] brought together they illuminate each other".[66]

In Believing and Seeing, Lewis-Williams sought to understand the importance of the eland in the paintings in the Drakensberg in this way. It was very difficult to recognize more than one or two paintings as direct illustrations of San rituals or indeed recognizable activities or practices of any sort but it was apparent that eland dominated the paintings of this region in frequency - they constituted 62% of Lewis-Williams' Barkly East sample - in size, in the complexity and technical skill of their painting - a large proportion were painted in carefully graded colours - and in their positioning - many more were placed over other images than are paintings of any other subject. He therefore approached his problem primarily by extracting from the works of Bleek and Lloyd all references to eland, and questioning Kung informants about them.

The eland could be shown to have important roles in Xam and Kung practices that surround girls' entry to puberty, boys' entry into adulthood through their first eland kills, marriage, hunting, dancing, trancing and rainmaking.[67] It was a particularly important repository and source of supernatural potency, closely related to the supreme god and dearly loved by him. Evidence for some of this, particularly the association of the eland with rainmaking, is strained, tenuous and subjective and very little of it is directly represented in any paintings: the eland is, for instance, only "metaphorically present" in puberty rites - which are in any case convincingly illustrated in only one painting - or in dancing or trancing and again only one painting illustrates an eland being hunted.[68] Lewis-Williams sought to demonstrate that "through its associations" and a "subtle interplay of ideas", the eland "acquired symbolic status" and "symbolic value".[69]

He had now abandoned the linguistic model for analysis which he had derived from Saussure, Levi-Strauss and Leach as "reductionist" and adopted a "semiotic... model of the way in which the paintings communicated... ideas and values" and "made statements on various levels", derived from Peirce.[70] Images could be divided into four "structural modes" (i.e.forms of composition). Activity groups might be purely iconic and "comprise only a few human figures engaged in quite indeterminate activities"; they might also "proclaim values associated with the activity" or "provide a valuable clue to the meaning of other enigmatic paintings".[71] Juxtaposed images were "even more difficult to quantify because in many cases it is impossible to be certain that a relationship was intended".[72] Superimposed images "were deliberately related to each other to function as symbols in a system of communication".[73] Conflated images, in which elements from different subjects were combined in a single image, were "objects not observable in nature; they may therefore conform to [the] definition of a symbol"; they were the "least 'iconic' and most 'symbolic'" images.[74]

In the terminology of Peirce, the paintings belonged to a particular class of signs, "icons": they were "scale models of objects" and, with their similarity and resemblance to the object, they provided "the only way of directly communicating an idea in art".[75] "Some paintings may have been only scale models" - "pure icons" but most "functioned as symbols", "operated as symbols", were "symbolic signs", or in some cases "pure symbols in that they were abstract".[76] He defined symbols as images that "signified an object by a culturally controlled association of ideas, over and above the properties of similarity".[77] He was now committed to "interpreting the art in symbolic terms".[78]

The "central" or "key symbol" of the eland had both inherent and implicit meanings. Implicitly, it signified or proclaimed ideas, values and beliefs. Lewis-Williams recognized some of the problems attached to the use of "symbol"; "symbolism has no semantics comparable to language";[79] one cannot "substitute a meaning for symbol";

"exegesis of a symbol produces not meaning, but further symbols".[80] One can only approach the analysis of a symbol "in a modest and empirical way by pointing to its associations in the variety of contexts in which it occurs", seek the "motivations or reasons why it was selected" and the "associations of ideas" that prompted its selection. "We can make statements about the meaning of symbols,... provided we limit the scope of our statements quite strictly to... formulations of the regularities of use." Doubtless with Vinnicombe in mind, he warned that "The temptation to reach symbolic bedrock.. [produces] comprehensive... far fetched and abstruse meanings, none of which are empirically verifiable [but are] factitious... elegant delusions... nonsense."[81] "Paintings had many meanings" and symbols "conveyed a range of meanings".[82] The fundamental quality of symbols is that there is no exact finite correspondence between it and its value.

In Believing and Seeing the interpretations of paintings that carry most conviction and seem unassailable in the numbers and closeness of correspondences between San practice and imagery are those concerned with the recognition of dancing and trancing in the paintings.[83] However, much interpretation derives not from any San statements but from Lewis-Williams' own imaginative speculations of "possibilities" of associations the San "might have made". Isolated paintings are claimed to provide "impressive confirmation".[84] He went on to demonstrate that these representations of trancing were not limited to the paintings of the Drakensberg but were a feature of all sub-Saharan prehistoric paintings. Parallels could be found in reproductions of prehistoric rock paintings of central Tanzania,[85] an area once inhabited by the Hukwe, a hunting and gathering people speaking a language with click sounds like those of the San but not otherwise certainly associated with them and separated by thousands of miles from the lands of the San speakers in historic times. He also showed that trance imagery was not a recent development: features of it could be recognized on painted stones recovered from

different excavations in the southern Cape and between 2000 and 2500 years old.[86]

In his repeated confrontations with the established authorities on the art, particularly Willcox but also Cooke and Woodhouse, Lewis-Williams was insistent that the validity and worth of his or their interpretations of the art must be capable of evaluation.[87] All hypotheses must be stated precisely, in a form that will enable them to be verified or contradicted. Hypotheses must be 'real, simplifying and explanatory'. Lewis-Williams formulated the following essentials: that hypotheses are formulated in such a way that they have "empirically verifiable implications" - that is that they are testable; that they accord with general theory, in this case with accepted anthropological theory and San ethnography; that they reconcile different classes of data, in this case different expressions of belief, in art, myth and ritual; that, within a single coherent, consistent, economic and simplifying (but not necessarily simple) hypothesis, a substantial quantity of data can be explained. Finally, the hypotheses should be creative and dynamic and lead on to fresh discoveries and explanations.

Lewis-Williams' later work

Since 1988, Lewis-Williams has collaborated with Thomas Dowson, a former student of his and now a colleague in the Rock Art Research Unit. They are both entirely convinced not just of "the essentially shamanistic nature of the art"[88] but that all the "art originated in shamanism",[89] that the apparent "diversity of the art is contained within the wide range of shamanistic acts", that "the shamanistic explanation is the fundamental source of the art"[90] and the "pervasive influence in the art".[91] While they still accept that some paintings of "activity groups" may have been "pure icons" and "narratives of daily life", even these "passed through the filter of art", and such readings were true "in a restricted way only" and "only up to a point", [92] and they predicted that such scenes would eventually also be shown to be concerned with shamanism.[93]

Most and probably all paintings were painted by shamans,

"conceived not in serene artistic contemplation but in the turmoil, terror and power of an overwhelming experience".[94] Shamans "remembered and then depicted their trance experiences" and all paintings "drew on the same shamanistic repertoire".[95] "A blend of real and visionary elements", they illustrate the shaman's "privileged" and "multidimensional view of reality", "their excursions into the spirit world", "the interaction between this world and the world of spirits", "trance visions of the spirit world".[96] Many paintings illustrate the entoptic, somatic, synaesthetic and iconic hallucinations experienced in trance and shamans' "construals" and "blends" of these. Very rare images that had been painted so that they seemed to appear or disappear through irregularities in the rock surfaces indicated that all paintings illustrated a "spirit world that lies behind the wall of the shelter": they brought to the surface and made visible "the actual contents of the spirit world". "The roots of San art lie behind the... walls of the shelters in another transcendental world."[97] They speculated that all images of animals may be direct illustrations of shamans "in animal persona" or "animal form". Superimposed compositions are now claimed to illustrate "the piling up of images without regard to any real relationships that is experienced in trance vision"; so are juxtapositions of disparate images and conflations of disparate elements in a single image: all convey "the feel and essence of trance experience".[98] Lewis-Williams and Dowson also speculated that "shamans infused their paintings with potency... potency flowed to the paintings where it was stored... painted sites were thus storehouses of the potency that made contact with the spirit world possible"[99] and hence, for example, imprints of painted hands may have "fixed potency on the walls".[100]

This is all immensely imaginative, creative, exciting and stimulating. It powerfully conveys a sense of complete 'otherness' and nothing is more essential to any approach to the art. It is a complete and convincing new existential realm. But it is very different from the carefully charted,

cautious steps with which Lewis-Williams began his quest. The qualitative change from a careful formulation and testing of limited hypotheses to a grandiose total explanation of all painting can be illustrated in the approach to superimposed, juxtaposed and conflated images which are now interpreted as depicting what trancers actually see or experience neuropsychologically in trance. It is difficult to reconcile this with the earlier interpretations of superpositioning as determined by conventions where the images were "symbol clusters" and "an iconic device to focus attention on a specific segment of a wider semantic", the "counters in a structure of meaning". The assertion that the artists believed that paintings were imbued with potency, that the paint itself was potent regardless of subject was specifically and strongly rejected in the early work, where Lewis-Williams insisted that paintings were not instrumental, not magical, not themselves vehicles of power.[101]

Critiques of Lewis-Williams

It is revealing to consider for a moment the reception Lewis-Williams has been accorded by former authorities on the art, particularly Willcox. At first Lewis-Williams had a pious hope of "amicable discussion" between him and those who had spent so long developing their "common-sense" responses to the art, because they shared a "love of the subject".[102] It was soon apparent that this was impossible. There was no common ground on the understanding of the nature of scientific logic or process, the nature of theory, the nature of evaluation or even of the meanings of such words as "interpretation", "explanation" or "meaning". The differences were even more basic than the prolonged debate on an "empirical" against a "deductive" approach to the paintings would suggest.

The two approaches were so divergent in every aspect that debate rapidly gave way to invective, and turned from the problems at issue to the people that proposed them. As is so often the case in southern Africa, the confrontation soon combined political vituperation with the personal. Lewis-Williams and his followers were branded as people who

"put on structuralist, historical materialist or Marxist spectacles (and see) the data accordingly and (are) greatly tempted to select and distort the evidence". Professionalism was decried as "activated by motives of personal advancement... being part of the establishment". Their interpretations were "governed by theory" and conformed to "whatever theory may be academically trendy as the -isms come and go". Their exposition was "close to indoctrination in theories currently fashionable be they Structuralism, Structural-Marxism, Historical Materialism or Leroi-Gourhan Symbolism or whatever". They lacked "intellectual honesty to look for contrary cases as keenly as supporting instances". Belief in "theory" as a "prerequisite to the collection of data" thus shows itself to be "untrue and dangerous".[103]

This sort of cleavage is the invariable result of a paradigm shift in any science. Further, advances in art historical analyses, be they iconographic, philosophical, theoretical or sociological, usually generate particularly vehement responses. The 'lover of art', the connoisseur who believes he has developed his sensitivities, insights and personal flair, feels himself challenged by philistine forces, ignorant and disdainful of the hidden beauties that are the essence of art appreciation. He responds by looking back with nostalgia at the simplicities of his lost Eden and resents any offer from any art historian of the apple of knowledge: "If we are to find room in our 20th century hearts for [the] paintings it is because they speak to us across the divide, because they can still lure us into their traps. Far better to understand [their] real impact on today's spectators than to speculate and approximate, make assumptions and jump to conclusions, confuse half truths with truths and take educated guesses about their impact on [their] contemporaries."[104]

Prehistorians have been dismayed that Lewis-Williams' fundamental dependence on recent San ethnography renders his interpretations inherently ahistorical.[105] His methodology precludes any investigation of how beliefs may have developed and changed. This may not be significant in interpreting the

art of the Drakensberg, whose content shows that some at least of it is comparatively recent but it is inhibiting in regions like Zimbabwe where the paintings are so much older. It may be that this is precisely what Lewis-Williams intends and certainly some of what he has written, quoted above, suggests "ethnographic despair" and that he firmly holds that any attempt to interpret earlier paintings is futile and doomed.

Anthropologists have claimed that some of the later interpretations derive from questionable ethnographic information. For example, the attribution of inherent potency to the paintings themselves, with all the ramifications that must flow from it, rests almost entirely on the evidence of a single very old lady who, though she had a San father, could not speak a San language and had never lived in a San society. Lewis-Williams recognized that "Too much of her testimony was false.. Some of her statements... are of dubious value [and] must unfortunately be tempered with circumspection."[106] An anthropologist goes further: "Anyone with extended field experience of using informants, particularly garrulous octogenarians, and reading the original report would be likely to conclude that Professor Lewis-Williams was being led by the nose up the eland track which he already had a disposition to follow." The same critic complains that another interpretation[107] "depends entirely on a series of inferences from the use of other... metaphors or symbols for trance... there is no independent warrant for the interpretation in ethnography and the other content of the painting does not obviously sustain it, it is in fact a guess... I do not find... this kind of guessing game... very entertaining or particularly informative."[108]

A fundamental problem with Lewis-Williams' work, particularly the earlier work, is whether he has developed an appropriate approach to problems of 'meaning' within human culture. I ask whether analysis of paintings should really be treated, as he insists, as a form of science, analogous to science, and capable of similar hypothesis formation and

testing, deductive analysis, demonstration and proof? Are aspects of a system as complex as San belief, and which is integrated into and articulated with San systems of cognition and perception, an integral part of an entire cultural system, susceptible to analysis in this way? Is the richness of pictorial symbolism susceptible to such analysis? Is this not reductionist and simplistic? Are the tests that Lewis-Williams uses to evaluate his propositions appropriate to the complexity involved? Are doubts like these a reason why Lewis-Williams has abandoned the rigour of his first work in favour of a stimulating range of imaginative speculations?

In another context, Clifford Geertz has argued that cultural systems and particularly those involving art are not susceptible to 'scientific' analysis.[109] For Geertz, culture is a system of webs of significance, structures of signification woven by man, a multiplicity of often strange, irregular, inexplicit, superimposed and knotted conceptual structures. It is not the sort of system in which the elements that make up the whole can be isolated and the relationships between them specified. Though some minimal coherence - a quality that has escaped the pragmatists - is necessary, tests of coherence are not impressive: "There is nothing so coherent as paranoid delusion or a swindler's story." This means that the normal scientific processes of evaluation are inapplicable. Further, there is no single grande idee, no single key, no single open sesame, through which to interpret the whole of a culture or art. There is no single solution. Research in art or culture is not like solving an equation. The complexity of human culture, systems of signification, communication and thought do not allow for it.

For Geertz, investigations of various manifestations of culture are more like the process of clinical diagnosis. Within a chosen framework of analysis, one will scan the symptoms for their theoretical peculiarities and diagnose their content and significance. Theory helps one "ferret out the import of things". The acquisition of knowledge will proceed in spurts. One guesses at meanings, evaluates the

guesses, draws explanations from the better ones. One aims at better informed, better conceptualised, more refined hypotheses and then makes bolder sorties. One must always stay close to the ground, close to the data, close to the primary sources, allowing for only short flights of fancy. The ultimate if unattainable aim is what has been named "thick description", a form of discourse with the artists and their society.

In fact, when one scrutinises the progress of Lewis-Williams' investigations, it is apparent that he proceeded very much in the ways Geertz recommended but this is obscured by the claims to a spurious scientific methodology, the pursuit of an illusory goal and the belief in a single all-encompassing solution.

An early commentator pointed out that in all his interpretations "Lewis-Williams has achieved an informative 'best fit' but there is no way of verifying that the fit is the correct one. This only matters if further stages of research and study will be based on the assumptions that the conclusions are true."[110] (This is putting Geertz' recommendation to 'make only short forays' another way.) Lewis-Williams now shifted from his earlier demand that "empirically verifiable implications must be deducible from the hypothesis"[111] to agree that he can do no more than provide a 'best-fit' and that there is no way of 'proving' or, probably, 'disproving' his interpretations. But proof was a "misleading notion".[112] "Proof is a concept appropriate only to mathematics and unimpeachable deductive arguments. A call for proof is therefore inappropriate in rock-art research." It is difficult or impossible to conceive "what element in an art could be shown to preclude an explanation... ", an "element of disconfirmation". "They are not 'given'... [they are] themselves theory laden... and are therefore as fallible as the theories they presuppose... It is hard to be sure that a supposed [element of disconfirmation] will not, upon further research, turn out to be [confirmatory] or, at any rate, a non-restrictive factor. This has in fact been our experience with southern African

rock art."[113]

My own doubts are more concerned with his understanding of the nature of visual imagery. Nothing was more fundamental to Lewis-Williams' first work than his rejection of purely iconic, illustrative and narrative forms as the basis of the art: a rejection based on sound and ample evidence. In his most recent work, he has returned after a long interval to the implications of symbolism in the art and reiterated the richness and depths of its resonances and ambiguities. "[It] is wrong [to] assum[e] that a painted figure is a 'rigid designator' with, at any meaningful level, a single fixed reference... The context determines just what the referent of a... picture is. There can be no 'rigid designator'."[114] But the gap has once more steadily widened between Lewis-Williams' claims and practice. In the latest work, all similar images have the same rigid designation attributed to them whatever their context. "We now have the task of trying to decode the art."[115] Interpretation has become a matter of "cracking the code".[116] Codes depend precisely on each of their elements being a rigid designator. Codes also demand a "decoding" manual and Lewis-Williams and Dowson have now produced just this, as the introduction to their latest book makes clear: "Take the book to one of the rock art sites and, using the index, look up the various subjects [that you see, for their interpretation in terms of trance experiences]."[117] Moreover, the way Lewis-Williams now establishes his single fixed references for many images derives from syllogisms like: "Whisks and hunting bags play an important role in trance dancing; therefore in the paintings these objects denote a form of shamanism, game-shamanism; therefore all figures depicted with them represent game-shamans."[118] The logic of this is almost as absurd as: "All shamans have two legs; therefore all paintings of people with two legs represent shamans."

The need to establish the relationships that exist between images, emphasised in the earlier work, is no longer apparent. It is no longer considered necessary to account

for the very different associations of different sets of figures, to explain why undoubted trance imagery surrounds some recumbent figures and not others, why some figures carry particular items, wear particular clothes or have particular emblems attached to them and not others. It is also no longer necessary to indicate how representative images are. These absences betray the new nature of the images. Only rigid designators can be removed from their contexts to this extent without hindering their interpretation. In the later work, a great deal of the imagery also seems to have been reduced to a level little different from "literal depictions of secular daily life"[119]: the only difference is that the subject is no longer 'secular' life but the life experienced in trance. The paintings are once again almost all treated as direct illustrations of perceptual experiences, though the perceptions have been moved from the 'secular' to the spirit world, from normal to altered states of consciousness, from the optical to the entoptical and neuropsychological. Despite his criticisms of those who interpret paintings as pure icons, and hence as no more than illustrative and narrative, this is how Lewis-Williams himself now interprets them, as straightforward, unambiguous, direct "realistic depictions" of the experiences of trance and the spirit world entered by trancers, "literal depictions of distinctive postures or features of people in trance dances".[120]

The basis of interpretation has shifted very substantially, if not completely from a conceptual to a perceptual one; from a basis in the mind, in the 'cognitive system', to reproductions of uncontrolled stimuli of the nervous system; from symbol and metaphor to illustration and narration; from complex comparative analyses to a simple process of decoding; from the rich resonances of multiple symbolic meanings to single fixed references; from polysemy to rigid designators; from "modest and empirical" to the single and comprehensive.

There is little evidence in practice that any paintings are any longer taken as symbols, with all the problems and

riches that this connotes. This raises doubts as to whether any paintings were ever fully recognized as symbols by Lewis-Williams. Whatever his formal definitions, in his usage, the terms 'metaphor' and 'symbol' appear always to have been interchangeable. It seems possible to argue that although he recognized that the eland functioned as a symbol in San myth and ritual, the painted images of it perhaps were never conceived of by him as symbols in themselves but rather as purely iconic illustrations of objects that were used by the San as symbols in other, non-visual contexts.[121]

I also question the monocausal motivation of the art, limiting the imagery to a single aspect, however important, of the spectrum of San life, the single grande idee, about which Geertz had such considerable reservations. The identification of an extremely important and pervasive component of the art does not necessarily mean that it is the only one. Once a single explanation for the entire imagery is accepted, explanatory power is in some ways diminished. The thesis becomes so comprehensive and universal that it becomes irrefutable. We have already dealt with problems of proof and verification and the differences between "best fits" and "truth". It is only necessary to add that it is always even more difficult to demonstrate a negative, and more difficult still to show that any all-encompassing vision is false; it is, for instance, more difficult to refute the existence of a single supreme divine creator than of unicorns and mermaids. Many of Lewis-Williams' new conclusions are now clearly and inherently both untestable and unverifiable. As Inskeep pointed out, "The identification of certain elements in the paintings as metaphors for elements in San belief systems seems indisputable, but... as soon as we move from the more specific metaphors... we are on less satisfactory ground, for this notion... involves a hypothesis [that shamans took on the forms of various animals to travel out-of-body] that could be invoked to account for almost all other paintings."[122] The sweeping assertion that all animal images depict shamans is even less demonstrable. The distinction between an iconic representation of an animal

seen in the real world and one experienced in the deepest phase of trance is equally impossible to define and hence test. It is certain that we shall never verify what spirit world, if any, lies "behind the veil of the rock surface". The indications of its existence may be as slight as an irregularity in a rough rock face but it is still impossible to deny. Our reactions can only be subjective and rest on such evidence as what seem obvious contradictions between the spirit world of the shamans, "a 'terrible' fearsome place," "a dreadful place... you smell burning, rotting flesh... and see grotesque spirits killing people and then god himself, terrifying and foul"[123] and the apparent delight the artists took in their subjects which seems to shine through most paintings.

Followers of Lewis-Williams

Lewis-Williams' earlier work gave rock art studies a theoretical rigour, discipline and academic respectability they never had before, generated a new vigour and attracted many professional archaeologists into a field that they had previously almost entirely eschewed. Many have adopted aspects of his approach with uncritical enthusiasm.[124] They have scoured San ethnographies for 'key' San concepts and the paintings for motifs that looked as if they could match them. Images are wrenched from their graphic contexts and correlated one for one with San beliefs. Analysis is replaced by "games of ethnological snap" to provide "quick and easy answers" to the "meaning" of images, another procedure once warned against by Lewis-Williams and, many years before, by Inskeep.[125] These works focus only on certain features of certain images, taken in isolation. Their variations, their contexts, their relationships with the images around them, the recurrent patterns of associations of which they form an integral part, and many or all of the associated motifs that go with them and that might modify their meanings or even indicate other meanings, are ignored. In a simplistic and mechanistic way, images are reduced to standardised formulae, tabulated and taken as universal, unambiguous evidence of trance in whatever context

they occur.[126]

Many of the new interpretations are validated by nothing more than the interpreter's feelings of what to him seem appropriate. In Zimbabwe, for instance, sheep are proposed as metaphors for trance for no other reason than that, like eland, they have lots of fat and eland fat, at least, was a powerful agent of potency. Paintings of distended figures with lines emerging from between their legs, which are generally but incorrectly supposed to represent women pregnant or in childbirth, have been proposed as representations of trancers because the lines were taken to represent menstrual blood or amniotic fluid which could, on an analogy with sweat or blood from the nose, have been used in curing rituals or as a trance-inducing agents.[127] The squatting posture of these figures then became by extension another diagnostic trance posture, be it in men or women.[128]

Much of this work is not even based on paintings themselves but on reproductions of copies of paintings, selected by researchers who were pursuing their own limited and quite different ends, and which did not, and never were intended to place the images in their contexts or provide a representative selection of them.[129]

The new works seek a basis in San ethnography, as it had been developed and analysed by Lewis-Williams, but fail to demonstrate that this has been achieved. Some of the new interpretations may seem to fit well with experiences of trancing. Some may indeed prove to be correct. Nevertheless, most fail to explain any substantial body of data, even the range of motifs within a single panel. They lack potential for development and none has been tested against a sufficient body of data. Thus little meets any of Lewis-Williams' criteria of acceptability, save that they can be made to fit with San beliefs. But as this was the starting point, it proves nothing. In methodology and value, this is all far removed from Lewis-Williams' own first analyses. Its crudeness, naivety and subjectivity points to the dangers inherent in any single overarching explanatory

principle. These works are as highly personal and subjective, no different in kind and hence no more valuable than the assertions of the worst of the 'common-sense' interpretations of the art. They are simply couched in more acceptable - or more fashionable - terms. It is imperative that a great deal of evidence derived from comparative iconographic analyses is marshalled in support of any system of interpretation based on metaphor, if interpretation is not going to give rise to assertions based on nothing more than personal reactions and judgments.

NOTES

1. Maggs, 1967: 100.

2. Maggs, 1967 and 1971. If, as we shall show, the art used a minimal number of human figures to represent or symbolise the archetypal group, the latter aim is, of course, unattainable. Previously, Willcox, 1959, attempted to determine the average height of the painters from an analysis of the positions and sizes of painted handprints. Willcox, 1978a, attempted to resolve what the barred penis represented by tabulating data on 115 instances of this feature from Zimbabwe and 170 from the rest of southern Africa and relating these to the size and colour of the figures, their equipment and actions and the numbers of figures in the groups. He prejudged the issues and thus vitiated the whole project by initially specifically rejecting the possibility that the feature might be "symbolic" and insisted it must be "figurative".

3. Tucker and Baird, 1983.

4. Compare Tucker and Baird, 1983, Fig.9 with **Fig.13.6** in this work; Figs.21 and 22 with **Fig.9.8**; or Fig.24 with **Fig.7.21.**

5. Thornycroft, 1986.

6. Walker, 1987: 146.

7. Lenssen-Erz, 1989, has attempted to define relationships using by transposing the imagery into a 'grammar' consisting of 'words', 'phrases' and 'sentences'. This is criticised and rejected in Lewis-Williams, 1990b and 1991, and Dowson, 1990.

8. Pager, 1989: 14.

9. Pager, 1973a, 1989.

10. Pager, 1990: 303.

11. Pager, 1990: 119. The animal involved is also clearly not an eland, as identified.

12. Pager, 1973a: 16, 193; 1990: 219.

13. Pager, 1971: 33.

14. Pager, 1971: 32-3 and 1973a: 323.

15. Pager, 1975a: 15, 47.

16. Pager, 1975a: 12, 13.

17. Pager, 1975a: 13.

18. Pager, 1975a: 34.

19. Pager, 1975a: 28.

20. Pager, 1990: 59.

21. Pager, 1975b.

22. Pager, 1971: 33.

23. Pager, 1975a: 86.

24. See Lewis-Williams, 1990b: 128.

25. Vinnicombe, 1976.

26. Vinnicombe, 1967.

27. Vinnicombe, 1976: 348.

28. Vinnicombe, 1972a, 1972b.

29. Vinnicombe, 1976: 251, 47.

30. Vinnicombe, 1976: 323.

31. Vinnicombe, 1976: 258, 259.

32. Vinnicombe acknowledges her indebtedness to Edmund Leach and she makes use of the work of Claude Levi-Strauss and Victor Turner in particular.

33. Vinnicombe, 1976: 347.

34. Vinnicombe, 1976: 350, 349.

35. Vinnicombe, 1976: 347.

36. Vinnicombe, 1976: 352.

37. Vinnicombe, 1976: 352-3.

38. Willcox, 1978b.

39. Vinnicombe, 1976: 349,

40. Vinnicombe, 1976: 347.

41. Lewis-Williams, 1989: 52.

42. Lewis-Williams and Dowson, 1989: (viii).

43. Lewis-Williams, 1989: 47.

44. Lewis-Williams, 1981a: 3.

45. Lewis-Williams, 1988: 1.

46. Lewis-Williams, 1981a: 3.

47. Lewis-Williams, 1987b: 253.

48. Lewis-Williams, 1981a: 22.

49. Lewis-Williams, 1981a: 16.

50. Lewis-Williams, 1981a: 16.

51. Lewis-Williams, 1981a: 17; Lewis-Williams, 1972: 49, says 48 sites were "studied" and 20 "comprehensively treated" and "complete inventories" made.

52. Lewis-Williams, 1974.

53. Lewis-Williams, 1975: 424.

54. Lewis-Williams, 1974: 102.

55. Lewis-Williams, 1981a: 13.

56. Lewis-Williams, 1986a: 171.

57. Lewis-Williams, 1987b: 232.

58. Lewis-Williams, 1986a: 177, 171, 177.

59. Lewis-Williams, 1984c: 246.

60. Lewis-Williams and Dowson, 1988: 201.

61. Orpen, 1874.

62. Bleek, 1874.

63. Lewis-Williams, 1980.

64. See Bleek, W.H.I. and Bleek, D. in Bibliography; also Hewitt, 1976 and 1986.

65. Lewis-Williams, 1981a: 25, 37, 36.

66. Lewis-Williams, 1981a: 34.

67. Lewis-Williams, 1981a.

68. Lewis-Williams, 1981a: Figs.10 and 16.

69. Lewis-Williams, 1981a: 128.

70. Lewis-Williams, 1981a: 3.

71. Lewis-Williams, 1981a: 20.

72. Lewis-Williams, 1981a: 20.

73. Lewis-Williams, 1981a: 22.

74. Lewis-Williams, 1981a: 6, 13.

75. Lewis-Williams, 1981a: 4.

76. Lewis-Williams, 1981a: 5, 6.

77. Lewis-Williams, 1981a: 7.

78. Lewis-Williams, 1981a: 7.

79. Lewis-Williams, 1981a: 127, quoting Sperber, 1975: 13.

80. Lewis-Williams, 1981a: 127.

81. Lewis-Williams, 1981a: 128, 129.

82. Lewis-Williams, 1990a: 9, 77.

83. Lewis-Williams, 1981a: Chap.7.

84. Lewis-Williams, 1981a: 91.

85. Lewis-Williams, 1987a.

86. Lewis-Williams, 1984b.

87. Lewis-Williams, 1983c, 1984a; Lewis-Williams and Loubser, 1986.

88. Lewis-Williams, 1988: 2.

89. Lewis-Williams, 1990: 3.

90. Lewis-Williams, 1990a: 44.

91. Lewis-Williams, 1990a: 54.

92. Lewis-Williams, 1990a: 27-8, 32.

93. I prefer not to use 'shaman' or 'shamanism' in referring to San practices because their origins and connotations lie outside Africa and are not entirely analogous with San practice. I use 'trancer' or 'trancing', which seem simple, limited, clear and precise and without such connotations. As far as southern African rock art studies go, the terms are for all practical purposes interchangeable.

94. Lewis-Williams, 1988: 21.

95. Lewis-Williams, 1989: 35.

96. Lewis-Williams, 1989: 51, 21; 1990a: 44.

97. Lewis-Williams, 1989: 91; 1988: 21.

98. Lewis-Williams and Dowson, 1990: 12, 15.

99. Lewis-Williams and Dowson, 1989: 36.

100. Lewis-Williams and Dowson, 1989: 36, 108. The evidence for this comes from two old people with San connections who have said pigments should be mixed with eland blood for its potency, that paints "themselves possessed the power medicine men activated to enter trance" and that dancers "turned to face the paintings when they wished to intensify their power": Lewis-Williams, 1986b: 11.

101. Lewis-Williams, 1974: 101-2.

102. Lewis-Williams, 1984a: 65.

103. Willcox, 1984b: 54-5.

104. Januszczak, W. in The Guardian, referring to a catalogue essay on the paintings of the 18th century British artist, Richard Wilson, quoted in Rosenthal, M., 1989, 'The death of British art history', Art Monthly, 125: 3-8.

105. Manhire et al., 1985: 163.

106. Lewis-Williams, 1986b: 10, 11.

107. Lewis-Williams, den Hoen et al., 1986.

108. Argyle, 1990: 65.

109. Geertz, 1973.

110. John Clegg, 'Comments', in Lewis-Williams, 1982: 439-40.

111. Lewis-Williams, 1983b: 6.

112. Lewis-Williams and Dowson, 1988: 238.

113. Lewis-Williams and Dowson, 1988: 234-5.

114. Lewis-Williams, 1990b: 129.

115. Lewis-Williams, 1988: 2.

116. Dowson uses this phrase in the title of his summary of his University of the Witwatersrand B.A. Honours dissertation: Dowson, 1989.

117. Lewis-Williams and Dowson, 1989: 3.

118. Lewis-Williams, 1987c. To dwell on hunting bags for a moment: if we examine the contexts and associations of hunting bags in Zimbabwe, we will find them on the shoulders of files of armed men; laid beside men in domestic, family or camp scenes in which women have their own distinctive two-handled bags as well as pouches and gourds laid beside them; laid beside copulating couples; beside large recumbent male figures; and on the shoulders of hunters who are killing or fleeing from large animals. They are never carried by dancers and rarely by groups of unarmed men who are largely painted white. All this suggests that hunting bags are associated with men in their roles as, respectively, hunters, parents, fathers, trancers and those who are able to induce trance in others. On the other hand, bags are seldom associated with dancers or with youths undergoing initiation to adulthood and hunting. This all suggests that the hunting bag is certainly a diagnostic attribute but one that defines masculinity rather than a form of shamanism.

119. Lewis-Williams, 1984b: 236.

120. Lewis-Williams, 1984b: 241.

121. Graeme Pretty, 'Comments", in Lewis-Williams, 1982: 443, hints at the same thing: "Lewis-Williams has produced a fascinating interpretation of southern San rock art by the tried and tested methods of separating original images from their context of symbols and referends through focussing upon metaphor."

122. Inskeep, 'Comments', in Lewis-Williams, 1982: 442.

123. Katz, 1982: 45, 113.

124. E.g. Huffman, 1983; Yates et.al, 1985; Smith, 1987; Solomon, 1991.

125. Inskeep, 1971: 104.

126. Yates et al., 1985: Table 1.

127. Huffman, 1983.

128. Yates et al., 1985: Table 1.

129. Pager, 1973, Huffman, 1983, and Smith, 1987, are based on Goodall's reproductions, 1959.

5. ASPECTS OF SAN ANTHROPOLOGY

We have established with some degree of certainty that the paintings in Zimbabwe are the work of an indigenous Later Stone Age society or societies. Though the evidence remains indirect and circumstantial, it points to the bulk of them having been executed between 10 000 and 2000 years ago; some surviving paintings may even be earlier and show evidence of Middle Stone Age hunting practices; a few may be later but it is most improbable that any are less than many centuries old. The paintings and the Later Stone Age itself are equated with the so-called 'Bushman' or 'San' people of southern Africa and there is good evidence to support this. They all but disappeared, as a significant and distinct social entity, from historical consciousness in Zimbabwe so long ago - their societies either absorbed into new entities, transformed or extinguished - that almost nothing of them remains in traditions or historical records. Only a minuscule remnant population may survive, along the border of Botswana though, sixty to a hundred years ago, San may have populated a wider area of the otherwise almost unpopulated lowveld, so entirely ignored that almost nothing is known of them, save in anecdotes of those drawn to the remotest areas. The only study of them was by Dornan, who established a mission station to minister to the Hiechware San on the south-western borders of Zimbabwe in the early years of this century.[1] For any substantial information on San we have to look further afield.

A considerable set of closely interrelated problems immediately arises. Who exactly were or are the San? Are they a viable anthropological concept or entity? What do we know of them? Does knowledge derived from tiny remnant populations in the Kalahari today, heavily influenced as they are by their neighbours of other cultures, help us to understand the hunters and gatherers of Zimbabwe who lived millennia ago in a very different ecological, social, economic, demographic and political milieu? These are still unresolved issues and heated debates around them are still

very much alive.[2]

The problems are rooted in southern African history: the very concept of 'Bushmen' and the many different perceptions of them are historical phenomena and have changed radically in the course of the last three centuries. These perceptions, of course, also determine to a very large degree how the paintings themselves have been assessed and understood.[3]

The English name Bushmen, the most popular usage, is derived from Dutch and Afrikaans and has even been derived from a translation of the Malay name for the orang-outang ape.[4] Its pejorative connotations are obvious and it is still used in South Africa as a term of abuse for anyone seen as particularly uncouth, especially if they are not white. If only for this reason, I prefer not to use it, though it now seems back in fashion in South African rock art studies.[5] San, a term that in various forms can be traced back to very early Cape official records, has similar pejorative connotations, and is still an insult used by the Nama for the Nharo and resented by them.[6] It was adopted widely but not universally by historians and anthropologists from at least the 1950's. I prefer to retain it: at least its pejorative connotations are not apparent in an English context. The Tswana of Botswana use the term Masarwa and were followed by early white explorers and missionaries in Zimbabwe; it is similarly pejorative. There clearly are good reasons for adopting names used by the people concerned for themselves, such as Kung, Zhuawasi or Zhu and their variations, but these are extremely localised and there is a need for some collective term comprehending more than local groupings.

What precisely these collective terms actually refer to is confusing: they mean whatever you wanted them to mean: a physical or racial type, a language group, a way of life, or a combination of all of these. They also all cover categories invented to mask reality and are used by those with power to comprehend divers persecuted groups who were unable to contribute to their interests and had no place in

their ideologies or constructs of their worlds.

Language groupings

Linguists have narrowed the definition of 'San' to refer primarily to speakers of a distinct complex of language groups in which various click sounds play an important part.[7] The relationships between these language groups were tenuous and none of the languages within them were mutually intelligible.

The largest of the 'Central' group of languages, Tshukwe, is grammatically and lexically remote from other groups.[8] It includes Khoi Khoi (popularly known as 'Hottentots') and the languages of the Gwi, Gana and Nharo of the central Kalahari. A 'Northern' group includes the Kung of the northern Botswana-Namibia border lands and the San within northern Namibia and Angola. Hiechware, once spoken on the Zimbabwe borders, is said to have had a Tshukwe vocabulary but a Northern grammar.[9] Speakers of 'Southern' San languages included the Xo, Hua and Huki of south-west Botswana and several groups within South Africa, of whom very few if any now survive, among them the Xam, whose language was recorded by the Bleeks in the late 19th century. The languages and names of the San of Lesotho and the eastern Cape and Natal are long extinct and were never recorded. Whatever the details of the relationships between these languages, what is important here is that analyses of them demonstrate that each was widespread and long-lived enough to allow for considerable differentiation, a diversity that must have been equally important in way of life, culture, belief and art.

Physical characteristics

San were, and still are, generally believed to be physically easily recognizable: small - about 5ft tall, delicate, and graceful; lean, muscular and wiry, with a light reddish or yellowish complexion.[10] They have little body hair and what there is is in sparse spiral 'peppercorn' tufts. Their faces are broad with high cheek bones and somewhat mongoloid eyes. Some physical peculiarities are considered particularly distinctive and diagnostic: an inward curvature of the lower

spine - lumbar lordosis - which emphasises a protruding pot-belly; men are considered to have a permanent semi-erect penis; and women, accumulations of fat in their buttocks and thighs - steatopygia and steatomeria. Many of these features are considered to reflect a single general characteristic, neotony or paedomorphism, the retention of infantile features into maturity. These are however scarcely universal or even common attributes; if they were genuine San characteristics, they were found most often and in most pronounced form among the most southern San groups who are now extinct. To demonstrate how variable the physical appearance of the San could be, Dornan satisfied himself that the Hiechware were genetically pure San only after some debate, because they looked so like their Tswana neighbours, were generally taller than the southern San, had a wider range of pigmentation and more abundant hair.[11] However, both Hiechware men and women showed a tendency to lumbar lordosis and steatopygia.

It has been claimed more recently and with much greater authority that San and Negroid peoples are genetically very closely related or indistinguishable. "There is genetic variation among San- and Bantu-speaking groups, although these can hardly be identified as separate gene pools."[12] It has also been argued that those who exhibit pronounced San racial features are the product of comparatively recent and rapid genetically transmitted evolutionary specialization, the result of strong cultural and sexual preferences for partners with particular physical characteristics, producing a physique peculiarly adapted to hunting with a bow.[13] The first point finds some support in the fossil record, where there is no evidence of any characteristic San bone structure prior to about 20 000 years ago. More recently it has been claimed that "available evidence [does not] entitle us to say that their small size is mainly determined genetically. Rather, their bodies express their structural position as an ethnically encoded underclass in the political economy of the Kalahari."[14] The concept of a characteristic and recognizable San racial physiognomy is perhaps as true and

useful as the concept of an 'Aryan' one.

The start of anthropological research

Serious, detailed, prolonged and sympathetic studies of the San began when the Marshall family started to visit and live amongst the Kung San, in the Kalahari Desert on the borders of Namibia and northern Botswana, at regular intervals between 1951 and 1961 and disseminated the knowledge they gained widely in popular and academic books and films.[15] Their pioneering work was built on by Richard Lee between 1963 and 1971.[16] This in turn led to the foundation of the Harvard Kalahari Research Group, which has produced many specialist studies on Kung diet, health, psychology, beliefs, folklore and archaeology.[17] By this time, less than 50 000 San survived in Southern Africa and of these less than one in twenty, a few hundred at most, continued to practise an exclusively hunter-gatherer life. The few score of Kung hunter-gatherers around the Dobe waterholes of north-eastern Botswana became, for their size, the most intensively studied human group in anthropology. It is also very clear and understandable that they exerted an enormous appeal in their own right and elicited an often impassioned sympathy and affection from all who came into contact with them. The impetus behind this work has been analysed.[18] Other anthropological studies included intensive work with the Gwi of the central Kalahari by Silberbauer between 1958 and 1966 and Tanaka between 1967 and 1972, while Guenther has worked on the Nharo San, living between the Kung and the Gwi.[19]

Given the many doubts raised about the validity of so much of this research, its uncertain relevance to an understanding of Later Stone Age or prehistoric hunter-gathering life or society, and the doubts about the 'San' as a concept with any coherence or usefulness, one must question whether any of this material is relevant or useful to an understanding of the paintings of Zimbabwe. Lewis-Williams provides some encouragement. Throughout his work, he has used the Bleek and Lloyd records of the Xam of the northern Cape to interpret paintings in the eastern Cape and Natal. He has demonstrated that his interpretations of the

comparatively recent Drakensberg paintings can be applied to interpret enigmatic images from as far afield as Tanzania and as old as painted stones found in dated Later Stone Age contexts in the southern Cape.[20] He has shown that Kung responses to copies of Drakensberg paintings indicate that they are able to interpret the content of some of these paintings in terms similar to the Xam; and that many of their beliefs and practices were shared by the Xam. Perhaps even more convincing are the conclusions of Wilmsen, the strongest critic both of concepts of a common San ethnicity or culture and of the relevance of the Harvard research to any understanding of prehistory. He too showed copies of Drakensberg paintings to Kung colleagues and encouraged one of them to draw his ideas of creatures from Kung myth. The results were dramatic. They convinced him that "the mythological content of these paintings... transcends time and tribe and ethnicity... [The modern Kung drawings] attest that the cosmological structure... has a very long history that extends into the archaeological past... Furthermore, that the cosmologies of peoples, who today quite literally are thought - both academically and popularly - to have had evolutionarily divergent social histories (some remaining foragers, some entering as pastoralists) can order the universe of humans, ancestors, spirits and nature in such congruent terms argues that these cosmologies were constructed and transmitted in a less segmented social environment than presently exists in the region".[21]

I too find sufficient close correspondences between Kung practice and what appears to be depicted in the paintings of Zimbabwe to be encouraged to use Kung material as an aid towards understanding something of the content of the paintings. I have not sought and cannot demonstrate any ethnic, cultural, metaphysical or cosmological connections between the Kung, Xam or any known San communities and the Zimbabwe artists, except through the art. * Using one to interpret the other is an empirical and pragmatic process and no more. Its success and validity - or otherwise - can only be demonstrated by the results. To start the process let us

examine in some detail some aspects of Kung hunter-gathering society, life and beliefs.

Kung society, economy and technology

The Kung San or, as they call themselves, the Juwasi, Zhutwasi, Zuhoasi or Zhu, meaning 'completed, true or real people',[22] organise themselves in loose and temporary affiliations, bands or camps, of between 20 and 40 people.[23] Within this, the family unit of husband, one or very occasionally two wives and two or three dependent children, spaced three to five years apart, is intimate, stable and enduring. It may also include a married daughter and her husband and a single elderly parent. Fathers take great pleasure and enjoyment in their children and have close relations with them, expressed in much fondling and kissing. Formal instruction and discipline of children are negligible: children learn by watching, imitating, helping and participating as far as they are able in adult activities. They share in a large repertoire of games, very few of them competitive and many based on enacting their future adult roles in the community. They are treated as far as possible as adults and are not excluded from any activities. Here, as in every sphere of Kung society, there are no divisions between people.

Families in a camp group themselves in a rough circle, all within a few feet of one another.[24] Interaction between all the members of the camp is constant and intense. Proximity and constant physical contact are highly valued. In the intimacy of the camp, nothing is secret or withheld.[25] A great deal of time is spent with family and friends, in long conversations, discussions and story telling.[26] The Kung are loquacious and the sound of conversation in the camp is constant. Communication is the outlet for all emotions and everything is discussed and talked through by all the members of a camp. Talk is the prime sanction in social discipline. Even mild disapproval, let alone rejection or ostracism, is unbearable and deeply feared. Loneliness is insufferable.

The Kung are consciously, fiercely egalitarian, ensuring

through their comments, jests and open criticism that no one is able to see himself as different or better than others.[27] Self-denigration and effacement are admired characteristics. Outstanding individual skills and talents are recognized and utilised but accepted without comment or praise. There are no specialists, and leadership is transient and certainly not inherited. Practice constantly reinforces the insistence on equality. For instance, though hunters mark and recognize their arrows, these are exchanged with other hunters and a kill is attributed to the owner of the fatal arrow, not to the hunter who shot it, thus negating any particular individual's outstanding hunting skills.[28]

Sharing is another basic aspect of Kung community life.[29] From it Kung morality and institutions follow. Sharing is not evidence of any unusual altruism, kindness, sympathy or generosity which, it has been said, are "usually lacking".[30] It is simply essential to survival. A person must belong to a camp to share; without sharing there would be no camp: a camp is a sharing unit. Sharing is most obvious in the apportioning of meat by a hunter and, more than anything else, the sharing of meat defines a community. Sharing includes the sharing of all possessions. 'Withholding', of goods, but also of knowledge or emotional relationships or friendship or spiritual power, is the worst of evils. Most items eventually circulate as gifts throughout the camp, mitigating the envy to which the Kung are said to be prone. This is formalised in hxaro, a system of reciprocal exchanges of tokens of friendship or gifts such as ostrich egg shells, shell beads, bead-decorated skins and headbands, of no set value or over any set period of time, between gift partners.[31] These exchanges take place not only within the camp but between people in different camps who may meet only seldom, creating a network of ramifying relationships between many people over a wide area.

Kung social organisation is flexible.[32] Resentments, tensions, quarrels and fights destroy the solidarity and cooperation of a camp and are greatly disliked and feared though not uncommon. But they generally go no further than

an exchange of insults and abuse; if they result in a physical confrontation, they can be dangerous, particularly with the numbers of poisoned arrows in every man's possession. Dissatisfied camp members move to another camp. This is made easier by periodic gatherings of several camps round the same waterhole or in a place where some foods are temporarily particularly abundant. These are occasions for reinforcing old relationships and forming new ones, arranging marriages, and a great deal of conversation, exchanges of presents, heightened emotion and dancing.

Camps are occupied for several weeks at a time and people move on as much from a desire for a change in diet or surroundings than from necessity.[33] Moves are planned according to where plants are ripening, where game has been located or where water is more abundant. Moves follow a regular seasonal routine and camps are established close to old sites at regular intervals.

Hunting

Hunting moulds the lives of the Kung. Successful hunting demands of the hunter a penetrating knowledge of the behaviour of a wide range of animal species under all sorts of different conditions.[34] The hunter must be able to predict where different animals are likely to be feeding and where they can be found; when and where they eat and drink and rest; when, where and how they sense danger and communicate this; the 'character' of different species and individuals within a herd; their condition, stamina, strength, resistance and 'bravery'; which particular individual animal will provide the best target; their response to fear; how to lull them into a sense of security during the stalk, which often involves how to mimic their actions; the direction they will take when alarmed or stampeded; what they are likely to do when they are wounded; what cover they will seek; how long they will take to die.

Hunting is a planned, cooperative enterprise needing several men to locate, track and stalk a herd, drive, head off or ambush an animal and then track and keep in touch with a wounded animal, finish it off, butcher it and carry the

meat back to camp.[35] Each hunt is different and each is exciting, dangerous and unpredictable and the rewards are rich. A Kung hunting party today consists of three or four men but this is again a reflection of particular conditions at a particular time rather than a valid generalization for all San.[36] Hunts may last up to two weeks, half the time being spent in locating a herd and half in tracking the wounded animal and carrying the meat back to camp.

A hunter's bow is a metre long and strung with strands of sinew twisted together. The arrow is half that length and composite, with three distinct parts. The shaft is made of the stem of a grass or reed. A linkshaft, of bone or wood and pointed at both ends is inserted into the shaft. The arrow head has a collar at the base which fits over the other end of the link shaft. Arrow heads are now beaten out of wire but were previously of stone, with barbs of stone down the sides, held in place with mastic. Poison, prepared from the pupae of a beetle, is smeared round the head below the tip. An arrow can be shot 100m but the effective range is much less, some 25m, and the optimal range only 10m. This means that hunters must approach very close to their prey and the final stalk can take a very long time, up to 40 minutes.[37] The Kung use no camouflage or disguises in stalking. It is as effective simply to mimic animal actions, such as the twitch of a tail reproduced with a fly whisk, to induce a sense of security in the animals as the hunters approach.[38]

Hunters will try to fire as many arrows as possible into the victim they have selected. They will also shoot at as many other animals in the herd as possible, in the hope of lucky further lethal strikes. The arrow head penetrates the animal to a depth of 8-10cm and remains lodged in the wound while the shaft falls away, preventing the animal from removing the head. The poison enters the bloodstream but does not harm the flesh. It acts only slowly and the animal will continue running and survive many hours, even up to three days, becoming steadily weaker. There is no point in tracking a wounded animal closely; it is even counter-

productive for it forces it to keep moving. Hunters prefer to follow it up after a suitable interval.[39]

Hunters often carry a wooden throwing club to bring down small game and even birds; a spear, 1m long with a metal blade 30cm long, used to finish off large wounded animals and for heavy woodworking; and a thin flexible rod, some 4m long, with a hooked end, to poke down burrows and extract spring hares. Porcupines, warthogs and antbears are dug out of their burrows and clubbed. On occasion a hunter may enter their burrows himself. Dogs are used to hunt small game, especially warthogs. Traps and snares are set for smaller animals and birds. The Kung do not drive game into nets and snaring is "a modest technique used largely by older men and young boys whose mobility is limited. It is time consuming and provides little meat..."[40]. Hunters all carry bags, often made from the complete skin of a small buck or warthog, slung from one shoulder and containing all their possessions: their club, poison, sinew for repairing arrow bindings and bow string, fire drills, a net bag for carrying meat, knife, adze, whetstone, pipe and tobacco. Some sew a quiver inside the bag; others use a tubular quiver of bark covered with skin.[41]

Hunting is only an intermittent activity but the returns are enormous: a single kudu provides nearly 1.5% of the meat requirements of an entire camp for a year and, though it only provides about 20% of a person's food intake, meat is the most desirable of foods. Meat from a hunt is carried back to the camp and shared out between every family in the camp by the successful hunter: the sizes and portions distributed according to a set pattern reflecting the help given in the hunt and previous obligations, bonds, relationships and friendships.[42] The sharing of meat signifies, symbolises, mediates, ratifies and consolidates the relationships and cohesion of the camp. It can also generate jealousies and resentments.

The division between men's and women's work is clear-cut - women collect wild vegetable foods to feed their families and never hunt any except the smallest animals - but it is

not absolute: men will spend some of their time gathering with women.[43] Gathering does not have to be a collective activity like hunting, though women usually go out together in small parties of three or four. Women spend two or three days a week in gathering; in one trip they will usually walk two to twelve miles and gather 15 to 30 lbs of food: vegetable foods, fruit, nuts and seeds, insects, reptiles like lizards and tortoises, eggs, small birds and small animals. Over three-quarters of all the food is the product of women's labour. Their only tool is a digging stick, used to grub out roots and dig for water in dry river beds. Food is collected in a variety of skin bags, larger than a man's, in a net bag, or in a skin cape hung from the shoulders and tied at the neck and waist. Gathered food is not shared through the camp but prepared and cooked by the woman who collected it for her family. Women also dig for or draw their family's water, which is transported in ostrich egg shells or animal stomach sacs.

Women may erect a flimsy semicircular grass or brushwood shelter behind their fire in the camp. These are built in a very short time with little effort or skill. They are used to store the few belongings that people possess, and as shelter from the sun when it is unusually intense and from the very rare heavy showers of rain.[44] Life is lived entirely in the open and centres round the individual family fire, where the family spends much of the day, sleeps and eats. The task of rearing children falls mostly on their mothers.[45] Carrying children when moving camp is a woman's most difficult task and the most severe limitation on the size of families.

Clothing is as sparse as possessions.[46] Before European clothes reached the Kung, a man wore only a small leather breech clout. A woman always wears a leather apron suspended from a string tied round her waist and covering her buttocks, considered the most erotic part of the female body.[47] She usually also wears a smaller apron at the front. Women wore capes more to carry their babies, small children, food and water, than for protection. Both men and

women take considerable pleasure in decorating themselves, wearing shell beads as necklaces, bracelets, girdles and head bands or in the hair.

The time men or women spend hunting, gathering, preparing food or maintaining equipment is surprisingly limited and certainly compares favourably with the average time spent working by a modern urban worker in a developed country.[48] A person's working life is as short as it is in a developed economy: children do not hunt or gather regularly until well into their teens and elderly people are not expected to support themselves. Life expectancy also compares well with that of developed countries. There are other considerable advantages over the life of a peasant farmer or herder, let alone a factory worker: life and work are interesting and varied, with great freedom of choice in what to do and when to do it.

Religious experience

We are fortunate in having a particularly full, detailed and sensitive account of current Kung religious practice.[49] All San peoples seem to have shared closely similar basic conceptions of the supernatural world to those expressed by the Kung.[50] These are fundamentally different from those of the revealed religions of the Western or Eastern worlds. San religious beliefs are not revealed, formulated, codified or defined but experienced, continuously renewed and confirmed by personal participation. They must be approached through attempting to understand the nature of this experience. In Kung society, the integration of a spiritual dimension with everyday life is so complete that the Kung do not recognize a difference between sacred or secular, cannot comprehend ritual, ceremonial or religious as distinct categories.[51] The Kung see their metaphysical beliefs as the subject of open and continuing exploration and discourse and not as a set of binding tenets. There is no dogma, let alone an agreed body of dogma or custodians of dogma. Beliefs are not even consistent. They are rather unspoken, unquestioned and almost unconscious while they permeate all aspects of life. They are not taught but absorbed through

participation in the existential conditions that create them.[52] As in all aspects of Kung life, children receive no specific or formal instruction in the beliefs of their society but through playing and play-acting and gradual but entirely unrestricted greater and fuller participation in the activities of adults they absorb without compulsion the attitudes, beliefs, arts and skills of their elders as naturally and unconsciously as they learnt to walk or talk. Learning is not gathering information but experiencing.

What we would consider the primary expression of Kung religion is the healing or trance dance, a communal dance whose purpose is to enable some of the participants to enter trance.[53] Trance dances are initiated by individuals and are responsive to the mood of camp and community. Not everyone dancing seeks to enter trance. Many who do, fail to go through with it, deterred by the pain and fear. Still, more than half the men and one in ten of the women in a Kung community trance.[54]

In so far as the Kung struggle to express and explain their spiritual experiences, they conceive of trance as a product of a spiritual power, energy or potency, num, that becomes active within the trancer.[55] Potency is conceived as a real material substance, and it is visible and tangible in trance. It is present in many human beings, in particular species of animals, birds and reptiles, in some plants, in planets and stars and in objects and things that include for instance, the very word for potency, the fire at the dance, the songs that are sung at it, and the sweat and blood of the trancers. Spirits and, even more, gods have it in a terrifying intensity. It derives originally from the gods but is shared by the community. In the body, potency is situated in the gebesi, the area between the diaphragm and waist, especially the liver and spleen. As it becomes active, it is said to heat up, ripen, 'boil over' and 'burst open like a ripe pod', become a vapour and rise up the 'front' and 'back' spines until it reaches the base of the skull, whereupon the dancer is said to kia, or enter kia, trance.[56] Those who seek potency attach themselves to

experienced trancers and dance with them, often in close physical contact, during the dance. Potency is transmitted to the novice when his 'teacher' shoots 'arrows of potency' into his body.[57] Active potency can spread from one trancer to another 'like the sparks of a fire'. It can also be directed at particular targets by extending the arm and pointing, when it will run along the arm and through the fingers and leap towards the target.

Potency is not finite, nor is the supply of it limited. It is also not a private or personal quality or possession.[58] It is infinitely expandable, divisible and renewable. All people have unlimited access to potency even if they do not themselves have it permanently within them or sufficient control of it to trance themselves. None is lost when a trancer transmits potency to other trancers or to the community in healing. It is not created or generated by the trancer by himself, but by the entire community in its singing, clapping and songs. The trancer is only the vehicle and focus of potency created by the community. It is not something that permeates the atmosphere. It is transmitted from one object or creature to another. Through the healing process, it circulates throughout the community. The relationship of trancers and non-trancers to potency is a reciprocal one based on the sharing of a resource in whose creation everyone has played a part, as both giver and receiver. It involves reciprocity through the community as the community helps the trancer to activate potency and sustains him while it is active in him and he returns it to the community in healing.[59]

Active potency induces kia, enhanced consciousness and trance. Particularly at first, trancing is an acutely painful and frightening experience which demands considerable courage and will of the trancer to enable him to endure it.[60] Trancing not only involves the obvious fear of the unknown but severe and searing physical pain - profuse sweating, retching, nose bleeding, contraction of muscles, particularly of the stomach, loss of control of the body producing violent and involuntary actions, convulsions and

loss of consciousness. It is inadequate to describe trance simply as an experience of visions, still less hallucinations. Trance is believed to be a real and complete if particular form of death in which the soul leaves the body and enters the world of spirits, a place of terror in itself, burning and evil smelling.[61] Trance provides not just a piercing vision of the inner spirit world but a means of influencing that world. There the trancer encounters the gods with their own especially powerful and dangerous potency and enters a dialogue or even does battle with them for the souls and welfare of his community. The trancer experiences such intensity of vision that he can see through and into the body. Illness, potency, the spirits and gods become not only visible but tangible. Trance enables the trancer to influence aspects of the natural world, its weather, rain and the movements of game. He is able to see over great distances, to see who are at distant camps and what they are doing, to see distant herds of game, where they are and where they are moving. Trance gives access to new knowledge and to aspects of the future: the sex of an unborn child or the appropriateness of an impending marriage.

Healing is another important function or consequence of trancing.[62] It is healing in its broadest and essentially holistic sense, involving the entire human personality and community, not simply healing to cure the specific illness of an individual, although this also may take place.[63] Healing is intended to enhance the life of the individual, group, community and entire Kung people, to confront contradictions and uncertainties, to reduce the tensions within individuals, and between them, families and camps, to free people from the stresses of a harsh and uncertain environment, to alleviate every sort of malaise. It is for and involves the whole community.

It requires the entire community to encourage, support, protect, care for and carry the trancer through his experience, to massage his gebesi so that it is receptive to the growing strength of potency, rub him with coals from the dance fire to heat his potency, sing and clap him into

trance, 'keep him alive', 'bring him back to life', make the energy 'lie down' and ensure it is of the right strength and under sufficient control that healing can take place effectively.[64] There is also believed to be a danger that he will be unwittingly transformed into an animal, particularly a lion, the epitome of uncontrolled and therefore harmful and malevolent potency.[65] The Kung are very conscious of the different degrees of trance.[66] A trancer always endeavours to control the depth of his trance and the strength of his potency so that it is active and effective but not overpowering.

As trancing takes place, trancers are continually sharing and communicating their experiences with each other and the supporting community.[67] This establishes some degree of collective agreement, consensus, coherence and orthodoxy to individual experiences. For every participant, trancing is an occasion for spiritual growth and fulfillment, a source of knowledge and self-knowledge, an occasion for prayer and an extended encounter with the spirits and gods. It is a powerful means of orienting every member of the community towards the whole and integrating him into it. Trance recreates the relationship of man with the spirits and gods, the human and spiritual. Through trance the Kung acknowledge the nature of their universe and their place in it. Trance reestablishes the balance of this universe. In trance, the trancer becomes fully himself and transcends himself. Belief is derived from an individual and real experience of the transcendental. Trancing is a spiritual discipline. Kung religion is essentially the experience of the spiritual encounters of trance.

NOTES

1. Dornan, 1917. Dornan, 1925, is a rewriting of this for a wider market.

2. See Wilmsen, 1989 and 1991; Wilmsen and Denbow, 1990; Gordon, 1990; and Solway and Lee, 1990.

3. The southern San, depicted as "the lowest of the low, treacherous, vindictive, untameable and little removed from wild beasts" (Stow, 1905: 41), were the victims of systematic genocide in the Cape and Natal throughout the eighteenth and far into the nineteenth century, at the hands of posses of farmers, Boer commandoes and British military forces. Only when their societies were entirely destroyed did white perceptions change. In the 1870's, Stow claimed for them "a number of savage virtues... implicit faithfulness in any trust... loyalty... unselfishness... devotion to family... hospitality, unflinching bravery... and love of freedom" (Stow, 1905: 41). In 1874 Wilhelm Bleek recognized, in a much-quoted phrase, that their paintings dealt with "truly religious concepts" and were "an attempt, however imperfect, at a truly artistic conception of the ideas which most deeply moved the Bushman mind, and filled it with religious feelings" (Bleek, W.H.I., 1874: 10-13). He may have been the source of Cripps' similar views in Rhodesia but for another century few other interpreters of the art agreed with Bleek. His daughter Dorothea, Stow's editor and the leading authority on the San and their paintings through most of the first half of this century, saw the San like Stow, as children, "merry, cheerful... thoughtless, carefree, without anxiety and worry, living only for the hour" (Bleek, D.F., 1930: xxiii). So too, for instance, did Dornan, who described the Hiechware as "light-hearted, irresponsible and careless... too unsettled and wayward in their manner of life for any real or permanent impression [of Christianity] to be made upon them" (Dornan, 1917: 40). It is such perceptions that determined and still determine most popular responses to the paintings.

Older and even more reactionary attitudes persisted. In 1932, Jan Smuts, considered by many throughout the world as South Africa's most eminent philosopher and statesman, described the Bushman in a scientific paper as "a mere human fossil..[who] occupies the lowest scale in human existence... degenerate... dwarfed and shrivelled and mentally stunted... a desert animal... there is nothing left for him but to disappear" (Smuts, 1932: 129). He had himself hunted down and "captured" "untameable" Bushmen as a youth (Lees-Milne,J. 1987. Harold Nicolson, Vol.II, 1886-1929 [London: Hamish Hamilton]: 167). Charles Rey, British Resident Commissioner responsible for the administration of the Bechuanaland Protectorate, now Botswana, reported in 1936: "I see no reason whatsoever for preserving Bushmen. I can conceive no useful object in spending money and energy in preserving a decadent and dying race, which is perfectly useless from any point of view, merely to enable a few theorists to carry out anthropological investigations and make money writing books which lead nowhere (Rey in Wilmsen, 1989: 272)." See Guenther, 1980, for a fuller account of changing attitudes to the San.

4. Guenther, 1980: 27, quoting Lehmann.

5. In 1989, Lewis-Williams reverted to using 'Bushman', where previously he had preferred'San'. He has published no explanation for this.

6. Gordon, 1991: 18.

7. Like some others, I have not reproduced the signs used for the various forms of clicks in my transliterations of San words. They seem an unnecessary distraction in a text intended for non-San speakers.

8. Westphal, 1963; Traill, 1976; Lee, 1979: 34-8; Marshall, 1984: 24-8.

9. Bleek, D.F., 1942; Schapera, 1927, 1930.

10. Lee and DeVore, 1976: 168; Marshall, 1976: 39-45; Lee, 1979: 285-92.

11. Dornan, 1917: 43.

12. Wilmsen, 1989: 312, quoting Nurse and Jenkins.

13. Tobias, 1961a and 1961b, quoted in Marshall, 1976: 28-38, and in Lee, 1979: 289.

14. Wilmsen, 1989: 312, quoting Truswell and Hansen.

15. Thomas, 1959; Marshall, 1957, 1962, 1969, 1976a, 1976b.

16. Lee and DeVore, 1976; Lee, 1979, 1984.

17. Examples are Biesele, 1976; Katz, 1982.

18. See Wilmsen, 1989; Wilmsen and Denbow, 1990; and Wilmsen, 1991. It is claimed that the Harvard anthropologists were seeking evidence for the nature of human life before agriculture, for a "window on the Pleistocene" (Yellen, quoted in Wilmsen, 1989: 39). Kung foragers were seen as the last pristine survivors of the way of life followed by the human species for almost its entire history. Detailed studies of them would enable archaeologists to interpret much of the material derived from Stone Age sites not only in southern Africa but world wide. In some way the San held a key to understanding human cultural evolution and would suggest ways to recapture abilities that would enable humanity to live again in harmony with itself and nature. This research was also part of another agenda. The defeat and exposure of the full horrors of unrestrained race hatred in Nazi Germany, the threat posed by the consolidation of racial apartheid in South Africa, and above all the Cold War, with the West engaged in an ideological struggle with Marxism and its basis in the divisions within society and the class war, and the appeal and influence this exerted on the emerging struggles for independence from the old empires throughout the world, demanded in response an ideology that

emphasised the unity of mankind, the single 'family of man'. This could best be derived from emphasis on a common origin and a shared evolutionary history for all mankind, and this was most evident in the common heritage of the earliest and least differentiated human societies, those of the hunters. The San were elected the last survivors of this world, whose organisation, institutions and beliefs they had preserved. They were "made the objects of an allegorical discourse on aboriginality and... transmuted into indexical signs... and function to illuminate and legitimize a crucial area in Euro-America's symbolic reconstruction of its own ontology" (Wilmsen, 1991: 20).

19. Silberbauer, 1965, revised as Silberbauer, 1981; Tanaka, 1980; Guenther, 1986.

20. Lewis-Williams, 1984b.

21. Wilmsen, 1987: 358.

22. Marshall, 1976a: 12; Lee, 1979: 38; Katz, 1982: 14; Wilmsen, 1987: 347.

23. Marshall, 1976a: 156-75; Lee, 1979: 54-76.

24. Lee and DeVore, 1976: 168; Marshall, 1976a: 288-93.

25. Even parents' sexual activity, though as discreet as possible, is not hidden from their children: all the family sleep together until the children are about six to nine years old and choose to sleep slightly apart from their parents and establish their own fires.

26. Marshall, 1976a: 285-93.

27. Katz, 1982: 26-7.

28. Marshall, 1976a: 296-7.

29. Marshall, 1976a: 295-303; Katz, 1982: 22-6.

30. Marshall, 1976a: 288.

31. Marshall, 1976a: 303-11; Katz, 1982: 24-5.

32. Marshall, 1976a: 179-84; Lee, 1979: 365-9, 371-87.

33. Lee, 1979: 354-69.

34. Blurton-Jones and Konner, 1976.

35. Marshall, 1976a: 124-44; Lee, 1979: 205-35.

36. For example: "On a few occasions during the year ten or a dozen [Gwi] men will set out together on a protracted hunt. This is done particularly when a giraffe is hunted, which

only happens about once a year because of the very hard work involved." (Silberbauer, 1965: 47).

37. Marshall, 1976a: 145-52; Lee, 1979: 128-137, 217.

38. Marshall, 1976a: 135-6.

39. Marshall, 1976a: 134-8; Lee, 1979: 217-9.

40. Lee, 1979: 139-44, 207-8. Manhire et al., 1985: 164-7, claim that hunting with nets is represented in a few Cape paintings.

41. Lee, 1979: 124, 135.

42. Marshall, 1976a: 295-303; Lee, 1979: 247-8.

43. Marshall, 1976a: 96-103; Lee, 1979: 123-8.

44. Marshall, 1976a: 84-91.

45. Marshall, 1976a: 95-6; Lee, 1979: 310-7: Katz, 1982: 28.

46. Katz, 1982: 16.

47. In the Kalahari there is less need for the long heavy cloaks worn by San in the extreme and prolonged cold of the southern mountains and shown in many paintings in those parts.

48. Lee, 1979: 262-5.

49. Katz, 1982.

50. See Silberbauer, 1965: 97-9, for Gwi trance dancing, potency and healing; Hewitt, 1976 and 1986, for the Xam; Guenther, 1986, for the Nharo.

51. Katz, 1982: 28.

52. Katz, 1982: 44.

53. Marshall, 1969; Katz, 1982: 34-79.

54. Katz, 1982: 97.

55. Marshall, 1969; Katz, 1982: 41-52, 129, 136-7.

56. Katz, 1982: 41, 44, 93-5.

57. Katz, 1982: 46, 168; Guenther, 1986: 272; describes the very similar beliefs of the Nharo. They believe xobe, 'arrows of potency [tsso]' and sickness are shot into dancers by Gauwa, the trickster god. Some trancers have actual arrows of potency, small thorns with a copper ring round the blunt end.

58. Katz, 1982: 197-201.

59. The Kung believe that there is also another form of supernatural power, now, present in all humans and in some large animals like the giraffe. It is received at birth and can be good or bad, its nature depending on the weather at the time of birth. A person has no control over his now or its nature but can use it, especially to influence the weather and interact with game. It permeates the body but is present in its most potent and usable form in the urine and hair (Marshall, 1957).

60. Katz, 1982: 45-8.

61. Katz, 1982: 45.

62. Katz, 1982: 34-57, 102-116.

63. Katz, 1982: 35-6.

64. Katz, 1982: 100, 206.

65. Katz, 1982: 101.

66. Katz, 1982: 96-7.

67. Katz, 1982: 205-6.

6. TECHNIQUES

Locations

Paintings can be found in Zimbabwe almost anywhere that granite outcrops. Though Later Stone Age people camped beneath the paintings at many sites, both big and small, many other painted sites show no trace of human occupation and many have rock floors so broken and uneven that they could never have been inhabited. There is no correlation between painted and inhabited sites. Many surveys have paid particular attention to the precise orientation of paintings and painted sites. These show that there were no significant preferences: paintings and sites can face in any direction in Zimbabwe (which is within the tropics and therefore has the sun shining from north and south at different times of the year); choice was determined by local considerations of comfort and protection from sun and prevailing winds, according to general common sense, not arbitrary rules.

The larger caves were lived in, perhaps intermittently, perhaps almost continuously, for many millennia throughout most of the Middle and Later Stone Ages: deep, dry, protected from sun, wind and rain and any danger of intrusion by predators; secure and comfortable vantage points from which large areas of country could be surveyed. They are well and evenly lit with no disturbing shadows and their smooth walls, curving into a domed roof, provided a fresh, unweathered and undifferentiated painting surface: a single vast and tempting canvas. Paintings start just above floor level and continue well above the reach of a person, into the deepest recesses and the highest curves of the dome and often outside caves onto much less well protected faces and onto boulders on the cave floor.

Amongst boulders on hill slopes, paintings survive in protected recesses, overhangs and tunnels formed where boulder is piled on boulder. Few of these are suitable for more than temporary and comfortless shelter. In the open wood and grasslands, isolated boulders were often also painted. Sites for paintings were chosen with some care. A

particularly favoured location was provided where a large boulder had fractured and the bottom portion or segment fallen away from the parent body, leaving a fresh vertical face under a wide overhang, an almost horizontal roof that shielded the painted surface from all but the heaviest driving rain. Surfaces completely exposed to all the vagaries of sun, wind and rain, heat and cold, where water could lodge, weathered, pitted and susceptible to the growth of lichens and moss, were, of course, unsuitable for either paintings or their preservation. But any rock face with an overhang, or which inclined sufficiently inwards to shield part of its surfaces from the full force of the weather, or was partly protected by other boulders round or in front of it was often painted. With experience, it is possible to develop a strong intuitive sense of which locations and surfaces are likely to have paintings. This is more helpful in eliminating unlikely sites than finding new ones, for only a tiny fraction of what seem ideal sites actually contain paintings. Despite the impressive total number of sites, most potential sites and surfaces remained bare of paintings. Paintings were always rare and unexpected delights.

The most detailed, skilled and complex paintings tend to cluster at about eye level, where there are often dense layers of superimposed images. Higher up and especially in the domes of caves, paintings tend to be larger, more dispersed and less detailed: artists clearly adjusted their images to the distance from the viewer - an ordinary common-sense response. Visibility was not, it seems, an overriding consideration: many paintings are almost hidden in recesses of the roof, in narrow passages between boulders, and behind other boulders.

The small, irregular and uncertain sketches of much less proficient artists tend to cluster on the periphery of panels or at the edges of a cave or in isolated groups a little distance away from the main compositions, though many are also in the interstices between a composition and echo its forms. Every set of paintings was a growing, living, changing entity, not a fixed and unalterable fact. A skilled

artist established a theme; this was then continuously added to, commented on, reiterated, emphasised or explored by subsequent artists. No regular correlation of particular images or classes of images and locations in the granite has been perceived. A possible partial exception to this is a possible slight tendency to paint oval designs, discussed in Chapter 15, beside or within small deep hollows in cave walls. However, this was very far from a general rule.

Painters certainly took little account of their comfort as they painted. All copyists working, crouched, cramped and contorted in sharp-edged and uncomfortable recesses or fully stretched, balanced on tip-toe on precarious piles of stones, working on paintings directly and very close above their heads on the cave roofs, trying to stand on narrow, sharply sloping and very slippery surfaces or clinging to a toehold on the edge of a boulder and stretching out across a frightening gap towards paintings on an adjacent face know this to their cost. No-one who proposes that the paintings were executed purely for pleasure can have experienced the acute discomfort of copying a painting. It is a point of minor interest that no matter what the height of the copyist, over a range of paintings the same difficulties and discomforts will inevitably be experienced: the positions of paintings give no indication of an average stature for the artists. In many instances the paintings can only be reached from a single spot; this must be where the original artist stood and the reach required shows that at least some of the artists were as tall as a tall European man today.

Many paintings are well beyond any person's unaided reach. In Later Stone Age times, when the level of a cave floor was up to a metre below its present level, many locations of paintings in caves would have been even more inaccessible. These can only have been reached by using a scaffold or ladder made of poles. Today, make-shift ladders of the trunks and branches of small trees, which have been lopped in front of the caves, can often be found propped together against rock faces to enable people to reach beehives in the crevices of the rocks. Similar erections

could easily have been made and used by prehistoric artists to reach their paintings.

Surfaces

The overall impression of a granite surface is that it is smooth and undifferentiated. In fact it is a sparkle of different coloured mineral particles particularly on the fresh unweathered surfaces that the painters favoured. Closer examination also shows that most surfaces are textured, slightly pitted by the differential dissolution of their minerals and scarred by many small exfoliations. The painters took no account of these minor irregularities: many paintings continue over fresh exfoliation scars that form small steps in the surfaces and are quite different in colour to the older surfaces around them. The shapes of cracks, protrusions, scars of exfoliated spalls, concretions, stains or differently coloured components of the granite may suggest human or animal forms to us. These very seldom seem to have been recognized by the artists or at least never became the stimulus or basis of paintings and were never used to give a painting added form, enable it to interact with its background or integrate it with the rock.[1] A single notable exception is a painting that connects with a crack formed by the weathering of a pale quartz vein on one side of a cave wall. Vein and crack have been extended visually in paints of different colours as a great meandering line across the whole face of the cave and made the basis of the composition and focus of groups of animals and human figures along, above and below it (**Pl.6.1**).

Surfaces that suffer from water running across them in heavy rain and which are streaked and stained in vivid colours by minerals dissolved from the earth and granite, covered by concretions or filmed by salts were no absolute deterrent to the painters. There are many paintings that ignore these vivid signs of water action and spread into and across them. There are at least a few occurrences of clear fresh paintings on granite surfaces that are now decomposing, fragile, crumbling and flaking. Almost universally, the paintings seem to float above the textured surfaces of the

granite. They are not integrated with it. They very seldom seem to respond to it aesthetically.

Pigments

There is little or no mystery about the pigments of the paintings. The range of colours is restricted to various tints and hues of earth colours. There are no blues or greens, which could probably only have been produced from organic dyes. Reds, browns, oranges and yellows - by far the commonest colours used -were all obtained from various forms of iron oxides. Metamorphosed sedimentary deposits containing these are widely distributed throughout the country, not in the granites themselves but particularly in weathered outcrops of banded ironstones in the geological formations that generally fringe the granites. Prehistoric mines for iron oxides or ochre are known near the Matopos[2] but there were also easier ways than mining to get pigments. Small, weathered, nodules of various iron oxides can be picked up freely and easily on the surface. Similar nodules have been recovered from throughout Middle and Later Stone Age deposits in all the excavated caves and most of them have smooth facetted faces and striations that show they have been rubbed by people against coarse surfaces to reduce them to a powder. Such nodules can also be found on top of the deposits within many caves, mixed with the debris from the making of Later Stone Age tools, particularly along the drip line at the mouth of the cave, where rain has washed away the fine aggregates, exposed and concentrated the stone debris, tools and pigments.

In 1929 pieces of pigment were collected from the drip line of Domboshawa Cave, site of some of the best known paintings in the country, and analysed chemically.[3] This showed that though the nodules all looked very similar they could be divided by the colours of the streaks they made when rubbed on a coarser rock. Red was derived from haematite, anhydrous ferric oxide; other shades of red and orange from limonite, hydrated iron oxide, and deep dark purplish reds or 'clarets' from martite, a black magnetic iron oxide and pseudomorph of magnetite. The darkest pigments, verging on

black, probably came from the same source. Other studies suggest that white was derived from finely crushed quartzite, silica, gypsum or kaolin clays.[4]

More recent analyses of lumps of pigments, paint from spalls and samples of paint from some paintings, using a scanning electron microscope, did not lead to precise identifications of the sources of pigments but showed red and yellow paints to be have a high iron content, browns manganese, and whites calcium and titanium. Black pigment on an excavated palette probably derived from charcoal.[5] If anything, this all lent support to the earlier identifications. Analyses of tiny samples of pigments taken from paintings themselves in South Africa, using the same method, confirmed that all the pigments examined from the red, brown and yellow range of colours derived from clays containing varying amounts of metallic oxides, often in small quantities; black was derived from manganese earth - pyrolucite - and white from a pure clay.[6]

The colours of pigments derived from iron oxides can be altered through heating the nodules and it is quite possible that painters used this to obtain colours they wanted. The colours of some of the paintings themselves might possibly have been changed accidentally by heat from fires lit near them or sweeping past them. Otherwise pigments like these, pure minerals with no organic matter in their composition, are permanent and do not change or fade.

The pigments had to be ground to a very fine powder, the finer the grain size the better their adhesion to the rock surface. Many paintings show vestiges of white paint outlining or decorating paintings in other colours, evidence of its wider use and poor preservation. It is a striking characteristic of the paintings that white pigment does not survive nearly as well as other colours and that most has fallen from the rock surface. This is probably a result of the shape and size of the grains of this pigment, generally coarser than those derived from iron oxides.[7]

Grindstones, with their grinding surfaces stained with pigment, have been recovered from the deposits in several

caves. The powdered pigments were then transferred to a palette and mixed with a medium. These palettes, small flat slabs of granite, with small formless patches of paint still on them, have also been found in excavated deposits. At least once, a tortoise carapace was used to store or mix paint.[8]

Medium

Pigments have to be mixed with a binding agent or medium to form paint and enable them to adhere to the rock. There has been a great deal of speculation, searching for reliable accounts of southern San practices and trial and error experimentation to try and determine what binding agents were used.[9] A medium must remain liquid and be easily stored; it must mix easily with the pigment and not discolour it; it must also adhere to the rock surfaces and dry comparatively rapidly once the paint is applied. Water was certainly unsuitable: it produces pale colours which are very impermanent. A consensus, supported by the little recorded reliable evidence of the working practices of the last San artists in South Africa, suggests that animal blood, treated to prevent it congealing, blood extracts or gelatinous extracts from bone or tissue, were suitable media, although blood temporarily darkens the pigments.[10] The presence of proteins or amino acids in paint samples has been taken to demonstrate that blood was used as a medium.[11] As we have already discussed in Chapter 4, two recent accounts tell of artists using blood as a medium and even of supernatural qualities inherent in the blood of particular animals imparting a 'potency' to paintings.[12]

Animal fat is also recorded as a medium. It is also used today by several San groups as a medium for body paint. It may have been heated, mixed and emulsified with water or, more probably, saliva, or mixed with blood. Some trials with fat suggest that it is as satisfactory a medium as blood.[13] Others, however, produced problems in its extremely slow rate of drying.[14] Analyses of pigments and paints using a scanning electron microscope detected traces of sulphur, phosphorus and chlorine in paint but not in pigment. It was

said that the presence of the first two suggest that egg was used as a medium.[15]

Several other media have probably gone unrecorded in the few reliable early descriptions of how the artists worked. One trial, for instance, indicated that the sap of the euphorbia, the 'candelabra tree' that is a characteristic feature of the vegetation on granite hills, has all the qualities of a suitable medium, in its storing, mixing, drying and permanency and it is also very easily available.[16]

With the conflicting evidence of early hearsay descriptions, and with the amount of speculation masquerading as fact, we shall remain uncertain of the media or rather the range of media used without a great deal more concrete evidence derived from the paintings themselves. It may well have been that different media were used by different artists in different regions; different media may have been mixed together: or different media used for different pigments. The painters were masters of their craft and probably developed a range of different responses to the challenges of position, site, texture, surface, scale, colour and pigment. They would have created a variety of different paints of different degrees of colour intensity, liquidity, thickness and density and chosen between them according to the images they sought to paint.

Methods

Artists were very aware of the different textures of rock surfaces, responded to them and adjusted their painting techniques accordingly: unusually smooth areas of granite bear small paintings with fine lines of astonishing delicacy in obvious contrast to others on coarser textured surfaces beside them.[17] There is no evidence to support claims that, in some instances, the rock surface was rubbed and smoothed in preparation for painting.[18] There is a little that rock surfaces within the outlines of paintings were primed with a whitish mastic that was then overpainted with a very liquid paint which mixed with the primer to produce a very smooth, glossy, varnished appearance.[19] One excavated spall was

found coated with a grey calcium-rich substance that revealed brush marks under a microscope and may have been some form of primer.[20]

No images were drawn with a piece of pigment directly on the rock surface: all were painted. Most paintings show that the paint was well mixed and fully fluid but thick, dense, rich and opaque. Opacity was essential and precluded too great a dilution. Though with weathering, it can be reduced to a transparent stain, originally paint had none of the qualities of watercolour or oil glazes: it was much more like a rich gouache. A whole range of different consistencies of paint were used: artists were well aware of their different qualities and adjusted liquidity according to need. The texture and poor covering power of most paints suggests that they were applied very stiff, thick and almost dry with short strokes of a brush in which the marks of the bristles of the brush are visible in the stroke marks. Close examination of the paintings shows many small irregularities as the painter's brush swept over the topmost surfaces, failed to fill small indentations but lodged paint in crevices and against protrusions. These blemishes are too small to mar the overall effect of the images: the eye overlooks and does not read them. Control was always so complete that it is very rare to find paint that has run or spilled and when it has spattered it is in isolated tiny droplets. Even paintings on the underneath of an overhang show no lessening of control of paint flow. Great delicacy could be achieved with a thinner, more liquid paint and it was used on the smoothest surfaces, in smaller paintings and for outlines. The finest outlines were carefully worked into the texture of the granite. Through this or through using a different mixture of paint to that used to fill them, they are generally significantly better preserved and darker than the infill. White, the paint that lasts least well, was probably the most difficult to apply. For outlines and delicate details of adornment and body decoration, white was once more applied with a very thin brush holding a dry paint, to give extremely even, thin, precise lines and lines of dots

which we generally can only achieve with a pen. More liquid whites were seldom sufficiently opaque and created problems of transparency. There were also problems over the purity of the colour and the risk of ending with a dirty discoloured paint. Only very few small paintings were done entirely in solid white.

Thick, dull, grey and brown clay pigments, used to fill in the outlines of some of the largest and coarsest paintings, partially or completely, were smeared on with the fingers or even plastered across the surface using the whole hand: the prints can still be seen. Some panels include lines of dots that were made by dipping a finger tip in the paint and pressing it on the rock.

The paintings themselves provide the best evidence of the sorts of equipment used to apply paint to the rock. The outlines of a great many paintings are so precise, detailed, controlled and carefully modulated that they can only have been produced with a fine, soft, flexible, hair brush. Many single strokes of paint are not only fine but long, unbroken and continuous - for instance those that delineate an arrow shaft and flight, or a bow stave - and could only have been produced with a brush that held a substantial reservoir of paint: again something impossible except with a fine hair brush. Some painted infills show small, deep score marks of very firm bristles. Accounts support the evidence of the paintings and describe brushes made of fine feathers set in the end of a reed, brushes made of the tail hairs of wildebeest and of spatulas of thin hollow bones.[21] Bone spatulas or quills in particular may indeed account for the feel and quality of skilled drawings that some paintings have.

Paradoxically, all images are based on drawing in paint rather than on painting as we know it. The first and most important element of every image was the outline, a single continuous line determining the shape and enclosing the whole volume of the person or animal depicted. The outline could be of extraordinary delicacy, precision and detail: weighted, modulated and inflected to give different emphases to

different parts of the body (**Figs.6.1-3**). In the most skilful paintings, the line is tense, assured and economic, 'alive' and 'dancing' on the rock surface. The conventions governing modes of representation were so strong and simple and the artists had such mastery of their techniques that there was seldom any need to alter an outline.

The way that the artists built up their images can be followed in the few examples of unfinished paintings. The first and most important step was to draw the outline, focussing on selected diagnostic features, item by item: the curve of the back and withers of an antelope, the mouth and trunk of an elephant; the hindquarters and tail of a buffalo. Each element was perceived individually rather than the animal as a whole. The graphic designation of each component of a human figure or of an animal was mastered and formed a manual of elements which could then be combined to form complete images. There are thus incomplete paintings in which the body and head are complete in all their details and partly or fully filled in even before each of the legs has been placed in position (e.g. the central young zebra in **Fig.12.28 below**). This additive process is at almost the opposite extreme to the way in which we are used to artists working: making a sketch of the overall impression of their subject and then progressively refining, altering, adjusting and adding detail, depth and form to this. Very few paintings show any sign of correction: if there is a correction it is a major one, like giving an antelope a lowered head rather than a raised one. Most examples of such alterations were probably by later artists adapting an image to new purposes, rather than revisions by the original artist.

In contrast to the skill and care with which the outline was delineated, the area within it was envisaged as a single undifferentiated field and received little attention: it could be left blank, partially filled in or completely covered with a flat wash. Many infills were done with great care and probably several layers of paint were worked into the surface. Often only the important, small or complicated

areas like the head, legs and tail were carefully and completely filled in (e.g. **Fig.6.4**, the central kudu cow in **Fig.7.1 below**, **Fig.12.1 below**, or the outline elephant on the right of **Fig.15.21 below**). One can see more of the process of infilling within the outline in the rhinoceros in **Fig.12.18 below**: the painter had filled in the ears, one horn and large parts of the body, starting away from the edge, reaching the belly outline and working towards the outline of the back, leaving the final most delicate infill until last and also leaving the legs blank; he had, however, already detailed the most significant part of the image: the arrows that pierce the animal. The degree and care with which an infill was done was in large part a measure of the size of the image. For very large paintings, the outline alone often sufficed. Many large paintings were partially filled, using a thick stiff brush and thick paint that only covers the topmost areas of irregular granite surface, and using cursory strokes which bore no relationship to the form of the subject (**Fig.6.5**). Paintings with the body only partially filled in are not unfinished; it was rather that the area inside an outline contributed nothing to the understanding of an image and was therefore of little concern to the artist.

Using a magnifying glass, Hall claimed to discern the process of painting: a first application of paint sketched the outline; a broader brush holding more paint, used in "freehand sweeps" started the infill; this was then gone over several times; finally a still larger, broader brush laid on paint like watercolour, producing a final perfectly smooth glossy surface on which each stroke can yet be discerned.[22] In general terms, something of this process holds for most of the finely finished paintings.

Something of the intricacies of technique is also suggested by Dornan's description of Hiechware San artists in the extreme south-west of Zimbabwe in the early years of this century - though we do not know what their paintings looked like and they almost certainly were not part of the tradition of prehistoric art in Zimbabwe. Their paints were "clay mixed with fat" but these were dried until they became "like

a stick of chalk". The artists "first drew the outline with a burnt stick and then filled it in with paints, sometimes laid on dry, but usually moistened with water or saliva, with a small brush of made of ostrich feathers". It took about six hours "to complete a set of pictures".[23]

To summarise, the artists, like all artists, brought an array of equipment, pigments and media to their work: pigments mixed in blood, fats and plant juices; brushes of hairs and feathers; spatulas and quills; and used them according to their own particular preferences, needs and skills and according to the effect that they were seeking, the scale of the painting and the detail and complexity of its elements.

NOTES

1. Lewis-Williams and Dowson, 1990, describe paintings in South Africa that use irregularities in their sandstone surfaces to suggest that some images emerge from behind the rock surface or enter into it. Nothing similar has been recorded in Zimbabwe: this may be accounted for at least in part by the very different surfaces that sandstone and granite provide: the sandstones are far more irregular in form and texture.

2. Walker, 1988: 40.

3. Maufe, 1929.

4. Rudner, 1982; 1983: 18, 19.

5. Walker, 1988.

6. van Rijssen, 1990.

7. Rudner, 1983: 19.

8. Walker, 1988: 40.

9. Rudner, 1982 and 1983; Huwiler, 1972.

10. Rudner, 1983: 17.

11. Denninger, 1971: 80.

12. Jolly, 1986: 6.

13. Rudner, 1983: 17.

14. Huwiler, 1972: 4.

15. Walker, 1988: 40.

16. Huwiler, 1972.

17. See **Fig.14.16 below** for a particularly small and delicate painting of a wildebeeste painted on an unusually smooth surface.

18. Cooke, 1959: 124.

19. Cooke, 1959: 124.

20. Walker, 1988: 37.

21. Rudner, 1982: Table 4.

22. Hall, 1914: 26.

23. Dornan, 1917: 49.

7. THE PRINCIPLES OF REPRESENTATION

No artists create a replica of the real world in paint, even should they wish to do so, and no artist, however gifted, has an innate ability to reproduce nature in paint spontaneously, in isolation and free of artistic conventions and the trappings of style. Painting is simply not like that. In reality, no painter is able to reproduce an object in two dimensions without following precedents or without being aware of how other painters surmounted their problems of representation. The process of artistic creation is one of classifying what they perceive and matching this with the range of graphic forms that they have learnt. Different traditions may develop towards closer and closer approximations to reality or towards progressive schematisation and the elimination of what was considered unnecessary detail. Painters of the same tradition express their perceptions through a common set of conventions. Painters in the same tradition all call on the same prescribed and definable range of forms. This constitutes the coherence of their imagery and defines their artistic tradition.[1]

The popular perception of southern African rock paintings as a spontaneous, direct, untutored and intuitive response by the artists to the world around them is therefore an illusion. The artists did not only share similar materials, equipment and techniques. They reproduced the same objects in the same ways. They used the same graphic means to achieve the same ends. They followed the same sets of rules. They had a single 'vocabulary' of forms. Their art certainly does not seem to us or by our criteria to create an illusion of visible reality in two dimensions. The images are almost all painted in a single uniform colour that seldom has any resemblance to the colour of the creature depicted. There is no suggestion of the surroundings or setting of the object: all images stand in isolation on a coloured and textured rock surface. There was seldom any attempt to explore the shape of an object in three

dimensions; to explore the functions, strengths, tensions, or forms of muscles, bones, tendons, veins or arteries; to reproduce texture; to illustrate the effects of light falling on an object; or to use shadow to model form, to reproduce or remind us of the volume and solidity of the object. There are seldom indications of such details as eyes or mouth - the elements on which we focus most closely and which we use to give images their individuality and expression. Many of the physical proportions are 'distorted'. Many of the postures are anatomically impossible, however suggestive or expressive they may be. However 'real' the images may look, they are all highly artificial constructs of intellectual concepts of the natural world.

Conventions

No systematic description or analysis of the basic principles of the art has ever been undertaken, no attempt made to deduce, describe or define the elements of style. The use of 'twisted perspective' has been recognized often enough in general terms but not the ways that it was used in practice. The beauty of the outlines of most paintings has been admired but that the outline played the determining role in the artistic system has scarcely been appreciated. It is possible to define the conventions that prescribed the way things were represented in the prehistoric paintings of Zimbabwe much more systematically and comprehensively. This is not simply an academic exercise. Without understanding the conventions and their implications, it is impossible to begin to penetrate the artists' intentions, what they were trying to express or emphasise, what they sought to convey or what their contemporaries would have understood from the paintings.

Nevertheless, when we seek to analyse paintings as old as those of Zimbabwe, the only evidence we can use to discern the conventions of the artistic tradition to which they belong are the paintings themselves. We can see what the artists did but we cannot know what the artists intended or sought to do. We cannot know how they and their audiences themselves perceived their works, what the paintings conveyed

to them, how they read or assessed or reacted to or understood them. Our own perceptions and reactions to these works are conditioned by our own culture, our exposure to and familiarity with our own artistic traditions. We inevitably use these as our norms when we assess the works of other cultures. But the artists of the rock paintings were part of a very different culture and visual culture. Our analysis is an outsider's view. We can define rules that govern their system of representation but cannot know the extent to which they were conscious of these or the effects or responses they created in the viewer.

It appears to us that the principle aim of the graphic conventions was to ensure that the significant features of an object were reproduced in an immediately recognizable and easily legible form. For animals, species and gender were obviously important. Age, temperament, condition and sexual arousal and receptivity, and through them indications of particular seasons of the year, are also the sorts of things that might have been important to the artists and indeed may be represented, even though we are not sufficiently aware of the details of animal behaviour to recognise them. In human images, the purpose of painting was to denote the significance of people as social beings through a system of attributes expressed by or attached to anonymous images. The overwhelming effect of the conventions is to focus attention on individual images and enable the viewer to 'read' the motifs that comprise them. The intention underlying all the art was to reduce every image to the sum of a small number of significant elements, to establish a comprehensive system of universally accepted and easily read signs.

Description through outline alone

As we have seen, the art is almost entirely based on the drawing of an outline. With few exceptions, no details were shown within the outline of the body. Eyes, brows, nostrils, mouths and teeth were very seldom shown; nor were the lines of jaws or limbs where these lay within the overall silhouette. This fundamental convention of the art does not allow, for instance, the eyes to become the powerful focus of

attention and index of emotions that they are in so many other traditions. Nowhere do we find the wide eyes and flared nostrils of a startled or frightened antelope or the concentrated stare of a predator stalking its prey. Emotions, if they were to be represented at all, had to be expressed through other means.

The different textures of the coats of animals were never indicated, be they the long, coarse hair of a waterbuck or the silky sheen of an impala. On the other hand, the stiff upstanding bristles of zebras' or sables' manes, the tufts of hair on a kudu's withers or the long hair down a kudu's dewlap were often painted in precise and emphatic detail because they could be shown breaking the outline of the body (**Figs.7.1 centre, 7.2 and 7.4**). Like all other animals, even zebras were painted in a solid flat monochrome **(Fig.7.1 centre left)**. This has led to them being mistaken by some of us today for extinct quagga, horses or donkeys but the details of the mane, ears or tail, let alone the proportions of the body, establish their identity beyond doubt. The front of the mane, sticking up between the zebra's ears, was a particularly clear distinguishing feature.

Animals lying down draw their legs against their bodies and thus they are enveloped and hidden within the body outline, yet only very occasionally were recumbent animals shown without legs (see, for instance, the group of small antelope in **Fig.7.9 below**). Much more often the four legs were painted, bent in positions of repose but extending entirely below the body itself **(Figs.7.1 left centre, and 7.5)**.

The general absence of detail within the outline of the body is a characteristic of Zimbabwe's prehistoric art that sets it apart from many of the paintings of the Drakensberg and what have been taken as similar artistic traditions such as, for example, the prehistoric art of the French and Spanish caves, in which the details of an animal's eyes, mane and head and the texture and markings of its coat were very often shown with care.

The primary necessity of the paintings - to achieve maximum legibility with the use of a single colour and a single outline - generally inhibited the overlapping of large parts of images, where one object would obscure most of another. It was thus impossible to give any impression of dense compact herds of animals. Several animals of the same species were often painted together but these never give any sense of the excitement of the unified movement, rhythm and almost single intelligence of a herd. The herd was not a significant visual image (**Fig.7.6**). A small degree of overlap within a single image was inevitable when an animal was shown in rapid movement and its legs cross or when a person's arms cross his body (e.g the figures on the lower left of **Fig.7.9; Figs. 7.10, 7.13 or 7.14**). When he showed these overlaps, an artist drew the overlapping elements in full, even though they merged in the flat monochrome paint and were not visible as separate entities in the final image. Artists were sufficiently in control of their line that these overlaps are readily legible, do not confuse the outline and even add conviction to the reality of the actions portrayed.

Description in a single flat unmodulated colour using silhouette and outline alone created many problems. The ears of many animals lie against their heads and hence are not visible in silhouette, yet they were often considered significant diagnostic features - not just for species identification but as indicators of sex, age and temperament. They were therefore considered essential elements in the description of some species. This seems to have been particularly so in the case of elephants. The problem was resolved in different ways. In many line drawings of elephants, the tip of a single ear was shown breaking the line of the back, a realistic representation of the silhouette of an elephant which is not raising its ears and hence does not feel threatened or threatening (**Fig.6.1 above**). In many paintings of elephants in solid colour, the artist sought to show both ears. They appear as two strange large tufts on the crown of the head (**Fig.7.1, lower right**). This distinct 'style' might have been used to indicate that

the animal was aroused and the ears raised and waving. If one does not understand the conventions, such 'tufts' can seem extremely puzzling or inexplicable motifs.

An elephant's tusks created similar graphic problems. When the head is in profile, the tusks lie against the head for much of their length. Only their tips break the body outline and are visible in silhouette. They were thus painted as two spikes, one above the other, protruding from the trunk **(Pl.7.1)**. This produces a very odd effect. The artists seem to have realised this and many adopted other solutions which will be described later.

'Twisted perspective'

Maximum visibility and hence legibility of the diagnostic features of both people and animals using outline alone was ensured through 'twisted perspective'. Objects were not described from a single fixed point. Instead several different viewpoints were used in depicting a single object, principally full front and full side views and occasionally views from directly above or below. Each element of the object was depicted in full profile from the aspect from which it was most clearly visible and recognizable. Bodies and heads were shown in profile. The horns of some animals are most easily recognizable from the side, such as the long swept back, curving horns of the sable **(Fig.7.2)**; or the horns of the reedbuck or oribi, which point forward **(Fig.7.3)**; or the straight horns, sloping back, of the eland. These were all painted from the side. Though they were shown in strict profile, they were nevertheless placed one behind the other so that both horns were visible. The two horns of the rhinoceros, one behind the other, are obviously most easily depicted from the side and require no rearrangement for both to be visible.

The horns of some other species are most readily recognized from the front: the horns of the kudu corkscrew up and out from the head **(Fig.7.4)**, those of the tsessebe curve outward rather than back while those of the buffalo curve down and out **(Fig.7.1, top left)**. These were therefore all shown in frontal view although the head itself remained in

profile.

The shape of the ears is an equally important diagnostic feature of many species of animals, particularly antelope: both ears were always shown, and shown facing the viewer so that the characteristics of their shape was fully visible, though horns and head may be shown from the side (e.g. the female kudu on the right of **Fig.7.1; Figs.7.2-4**). The twisting of the ears in relationship to the head and horns created problems over the relative positions of horns and ears. There seem to have been no hard and fast rules governing their resolution. Even in paintings of the same species, ears were painted in all possible relationships to the horns: in front of them, behind them (producing what seems to us the very odd image of the buffalo in **Fig.8.31 below**), between them or alternating with them (e.g. the tsessebe at the bottom of **Fig.14.15 below**).

Warthog tusks, sweeping out and back from the jaw but not projecting beyond the silhouette of the muzzle in side view, were not painted from the front because of the problems this would have created in representing the head shape, but from above (**Fig.7.7**). Where split hooves needed to be shown, the hoof was painted from in front or above while the leg was still shown from the side (e.g. the kudu on the right of **Fig.7.1; Fig.7.7**). Crocodiles were generally painted from above or below so that the artist could contrast the full curves of the belly with the narrow head and narrow curved tail and show all four legs without difficulty: things impossible to show clearly from the side. Their open jaws and teeth, if shown at all, obviously had to be shown from the side (**Fig.7.8**). It was often considered necessary to make an elephant's tusks visible along their entire length. To achieve this, the upper jaw was twisted to the front while the head remained in profile, making the roots of both tusks visible (e.g. the elephant on the right of **Fig.7.1**). The tusks could then be shown sweeping down from the roots. They were then twisted yet again, away from the body in opposite directions so that their full curves were visible (e.g. in the large outline elephant on the left of **Fig.1.1 above**).

Many of the problems that arose from using different viewpoints would have been solved by using three-quarter views but this would have necessitated the visual tricks of foreshortening. This the artists of Zimbabwe did not do, although it was a minor element in the paintings of the Drakensberg.[2] Many of the problems would also have been lessened or eliminated if the artists had used different colours or different shades of the same colour in a single image. These were again generally not conceived as possible solutions. Even where an elephant's tusks were painted in white and its body in a dark colour, still all the tricks of different and changing viewpoints were employed to ensure that each element was isolated and made as fully visible as possible.

The human body

A detailed set of graphic devices was developed to describe the human body. The lower body, buttocks, genitals, legs and feet were always shown in profile. Sometimes the upper body was shown twisted to the front in order to show both shoulders, separate the arms and make gestures more legible. The wide shoulders and narrow waist that result could give an elongated and elegant triangular shape to the torso (**Figs.7.9 and 7.10**). In less skilled hands it had much less successful results: **Fig.7.11**. The triangular torso is a result of using 'twisted perspective' and painting the body from two different viewpoints simultaneously, the front and the side, a basic convention of all the paintings though it misled Frobenius, who took its most elegant form to be a stylistic trait diagnostic of foreign painters.[3]

The head could be shown as a circle or horizontal oval. Often with this form of head, the neck is either unusually long or omitted altogether **(Fig.7.10)**. More usually, head and face were shown in profile. For the artists, head and face were conceptually distinct. The forehead, seen as part of the head, is generally shown as a large rounded boss protruding over the face, which is depicted as a simple rectangle, protruding horizontally or vertically below the forehead **(Figs.7.9 and 7.12)**. This form of face is often

interpreted as representing the muzzle of an animal or as an animal mask.[4] It is rather the consequence of the way head and face were conceptualised as distinct entities. The nose was almost never represented and little attention was paid to the mouth. When it was shown, it was to give emphasis to specific actions, such as eating (e.g. **Fig.8.32 below**), or to enable emblems, such as tusks to be attached to it (e.g **Figs.13.11, 13.12** or **14.10 below**). If it was not in the form of a rounded forehead and protruding 'muzzle', the profile was generally no more than an irregular line. Only very occasionally were the line of the nose, lips and chin painted with precision, and sometimes with such delicacy and detail that they convey age, character and emotion (**Figs.7.13 and 9.1 below**). In European painting, the profile is a primary means of expressing individuality and, whether the artist desires it or not, almost inevitably it will do so. This runs counter to the weight of San artistic tradition, which was concerned with the general and not with the individual and hence is very seldom seen.

Many human figures have what seem to be pointed ears protruding from the tops of their heads. It has generally been assumed that these must represent caps, masks or disguises to which animal ears have been attached.[5] This interpretation is then supported by accounts of San wearing such objects for camouflage in hunting or in dancing. In fact because human ears lie entirely against the head and do not break its outline, when for some reason it was considered necessary to show a person's ears, this was the only way within the conventions that it could be done (e.g. **Fig.14.8 below**). In the same way, where artists sought to express symptoms of stress, like dilated veins (e.g.in the necks of the hunters in **Figs.13.4 and 13.5 below**) or tense muscles (e.g. the biceps of the hunters in **Figs.7.14, 13.5 and 13.6 below**), this again could only be done by altering the outline of the body.

Significant elements of the body were generally sharply and unnaturally differentiated (**Fig.7.14**). The buttocks, thighs and calves were given distinct full curves and knees

and ankles were narrowed, often emphatically. Feet were usually unnaturally small, often with a well-turned heel and instep. Toes were very rarely shown. Less attention was paid to the arms and hands and they were less clearly differentiated from each other. For specific purposes, apparently to denote fear, alarm or clapping, the fingers could be shown extended and splayed out (e.g. **Fig.8.29 below**). The clenched hand or fist, even when the hand was grasping something, was never emphasised.

Where it was necessary to make a person's gender absolutely clear, external sexual characteristics were represented free of the body outline. A woman's breasts were therefore shown sticking out from the chest as two long cylinders, one above the other **(Fig.7.10)**. A man's penis was also shown free of the body, above the legs (**Fig.7.14**). The scrotum, in the rare instances where it was shown, was treated in the same way (e.g. the figure on the left of **Fig.7.14** and **Fig.13.4 below**). Female sexual organs were almost never represented (but see the special category of figures shown in **Figs.11.1** and **11.6 below**). These modes of representation are once again the products of a graphic convention. They are not, as is often claimed, illustrations of the supposed curious feature of Bushman anatomy - a permanent semi-erect penis.[6] Gender was more often indicated through proportions, postures, clothes and equipment. The forms of a woman's body are fuller and more rounded, the curves more emphatic and the buttocks larger (e.g. **Fig.8.15 below**). Women were never shown running. Men's bodies have harder, straighter lines, especially of the torso and the energy of their movements was much greater.

Although people are also always shown in sufficient isolation to be represented complete in every detail, there is a more frequent and stronger sense of unity and rhythm in scenes of human groups than there is in herds of animals. Lines of hunters and dancers are shown in identical attitudes and this repetition seems to have been used to convey the sense of the united purpose of a group, a further deliberate negation of individuality that is a fundamental

characteristic of the art. Family groups are also composed so that the figures interact with each other and form a single visual whole (e.g. **Fig.7.25**).

Colour

Almost all the paintings are flat uniform monochromes with no texture, tones, shades or modulations. With few exceptions the colours bear no resemblance to the true colours of the subject. The extensive quantitative analyses of Pager, Vinnicombe and others assumed colour to be a significant attribute.[7] All failed to demonstrate this or to identify any pattern to the colours used. Any animal and any human subject could be painted in any of the colours in the artists' repertoire. Particular colours were in no way restricted to particular subjects or activities. There was no attempt to match colour with subject. Far from being the basis of style as so many early researchers insisted, choice of colour seems to follow no rules, obey no conventions and take no account of reality. There are also no indications that colours were chosen for any aesthetic reasons. Colour seems to have been so irrelevant that it almost seems that artists simply used any convenient pigment that was to hand, did not in any way distinguish between colours and were entirely unconcerned and even unaware of the colours they were using. For all practical or aesthetic purposes, the paintings need not have been in colour at all.

While almost no paintings made reference to actual body markings of the subject, there are many exceptions in paintings of zebra and giraffe. These usually use two colours to detail the body markings within the outline, though they are seldom the actual colours of the animals. Monochrome paintings of zebra seem particularly odd to us because the most distinctive and striking thing about the species is its markings; it seems many artists also found such representations unsatisfactory, perhaps particularly as theirs was a linear art and the zebra's stripes lend themselves to linear representation. The zebra thus became almost the only animal which was often shown with its markings (**Fig.7.6**). The painted stripes often seem to

emphasise the characteristic firm rotundity of these animals, sometimes with great assurance (e.g. **Fig.10.1 below**). This is the only instance in which artists seem to show an awareness of solid volume and form but this is more a consequence of the desire to reproduce the surface markings accurately than a real concern with exploring the aesthetic potential of solid forms. Many paintings of giraffe show the patterning of their coats and there was even more concern, perhaps particularly in the south-west of Zimbabwe, to show the dark line of the mane and down the head and back, often all that remains of many paintings of giraffe (see the giraffe at the top centre of **Fig.1.2 above**).

On the other hand, the even more striking markings of some felines, like the leopard, cheetah or cerval, were seldom if ever shown (but see the top right centre of **Fig.1.2 above**). Particularly strange is the absence of any representation of any of the richly patterned and strongly contrasting colours of snakes and birds which, though they are primary diagnostic features, were never indicated. These omissions seem to reflect a general disinterest, a lack of aesthetic or emotional involvement, in predators, reptiles and birds: they are poorly represented in the art in numbers, size, detail and skill of execution. Most representations of them are generally so small, static and careless that even species are often difficult to identify (e.g. the birds in **Figs.7.20** and **7.23**; the carnivores on the left of **Fig.1.1 above**, in **Fig.1.2 above** and at the bottom of **Fig.8.5 below**; and the snakes in **Figs.14.13** and **15.23 below**). 'Common-sense' interpreters of the art would claim that this disinterest reflects that these creatures were either dangerous or unacceptable as food. There may be some substance in this: the Kung, for instance, were indifferent to birds and snakes as food and had an absolute prohibition on eating felines.[8] But it is clear that, in general, the animals chosen as subjects of the paintings cannot be correlated with their importance as food.

Graded colours

A very small group of paintings in the Matopo Hills reproduce

not only the markings but the actual coloration of some animals, particularly giraffe, with such accuracy and detail that they provide what seems to us an entirely different level of realism. The two giraffe of **Pl.7.2** are justly celebrated as the peak of naturalism in the art. The dark reticulations were painted over a lighter body colour in pigments that closely match the actual body colours. White paint was mixed and graded into the body pigment to reproduce the actual colours of the light undersides of the animals. The use of graded colour even enabled the artist to show the tail passing over a hind leg to its root within the shape of the body: an almost unique example of overlapping elements being reproduced as they appear and an extremely unusual example of naturalistic detail within the body (**Pl.7.3**). The zebras of **Pl.7.4** show the same very unusual use of graded colours though they have less resemblance to actual colours of the species and the stripes are omitted.

The grading of colours was common practice in the Drakensberg but such paintings are so exceptional and stand so far outside the canon of the art of Zimbabwe that one is almost tempted to suggest that they are either very late manifestations of the tradition, establishing new possibilities of realistic representation that were never pursued, or they are the work of artists from outside the regional tradition.

White details

One colour was treated differently from all the rest: white was very frequently used to embellish, decorate, add detail and outline the paintings. Given the problems over the adhesion of white pigment, its use was originally probably not only a great deal more widespread than surviving paintings with white elements suggest but may have been an almost universal feature of the art. Many paintings of people but even more of animals were outlined with an even, thin, dry, white line (**Figs.7.7, 7.12 and 7.15**). Sometimes this outline was enlarged and inflected to reproduce appearance: to incorporate, for instance, the white underside of an antelope's tail or the insides of its ears. But in

general outlining added nothing to the paintings in terms of aesthetic appeal or information about appearance.

Exceptions to the basic principle that everything should be described through the overall outline alone, are details within the body outline in a pure white pigment. The long light hairs on the manes, dewlaps or ears of some animals were occasionally detailed in white: the white circle on the rump of a waterbuck, the most striking and diagnostic feature of the species, is shown in **Fig.7.15.** The faint light stripes on a kudu's back are shown in **Fig.7.1 centre.** The bodies of zebras were sometimes also striped in white: a reversal of the natural markings of the animal for it is the stripes not the background colour that are dark. The light colours under the jaws and on the stomachs and lower legs of many antelope, like the sable, kudu and eland; the striking facial stripes and eye surrounds of the sable (**Fig.7.16**); and the reticulated patterns of a giraffe were reproduced more or less realistically in white. However, only the most delicate lines were painted over the body colour, and white paint was only extremely exceptionally graded into the body colour or mixed with it to produce lighter shades. Instead, areas of the original painting were left blank and subsequently filled in in pure white; the division between the two remained sharply demarcated (**Fig.7.17**). The strong, sharp and unnatural contrasts between the two colours can seem to us to jar and detract from rather than enhance the realism of an image. Where the white pigment has now disappeared, it can result in even stranger effects: many kudu appear to have grotesquely small distorted heads because the white that formed their lower jaws is no longer there (**Fig.7.18**).

The only occasions on which the eyes were indicated was when the artists depicted sable antelope whose striking facial markings include white round the eyes or when dancers painted their bodies to represent sable and included in this white circles round their eyes (**Pls.9.1 and 9.2 below**). These paintings provide another example of the use of 'twisted perspective', for both eyes were shown from the front, even though the rest of the face and head were in

profile.

White could also be used to pattern the bodies of animals in ways that had nothing to do with appearance. The bodies of some animals are covered in strange geometric patterns of straight white lines. Zebra in particular could be covered in white lines that had no resemblance to their natural markings. The coats of many felines, especially the leopard, are sometimes covered with white dots. They do not reproduce the colours, shapes or patterns of the natural spots. If we are predisposed to see the art as realistic, this use of white apparently to represent dark spots seems particularly perverse in its reversal of nature. Other animals and reptiles were also covered with lines of white dots (e.g. **Figs.15.17, 15.19 and 15.20 below**). Parallel white lines round the necks, legs and bodies of many animals seem to represent necklaces and bangles (**Figs.7.7, 7.15 and 7.19**). None of these motifs illustrates reality.

Most of the white details painted on people do seem to be straightforward representations of body paint and adornments. Some white lines and lines of dots clearly represent necklaces, girdles, bangles and anklets made of shell beads; though, of course, these may have conveyed something further as well (see **Figs.9.7, 11.2, 11.7** and **11.18 below**). Some figures have the white markings of specific animals, like the sable, painted over them, identifying them with the animal (e.g. **Pls.9.1 and 9.2 below**). Some figures are covered with random lines of white (e.g. **Fig.9.6 below**), scatters of dots or outlined in white dots (e.g. **Fig.9.14 below**). A few figures were painted entirely or almost entirely in white.

The way that white was used in the art is the best demonstration that colours were not seen primarily as a method of reproducing reality. White often seems to have been used as a colour with special connotations, used to delineate particularly significant characteristics and to signify a concept or range of concepts beyond visible reality. Many uses of white may represent the superimposition of a metaphysical imagery on representations

of physical objects. This seems to have been so widespread that it became a basic convention of the art as a whole.

Light, background, setting and scale

Pursuing the fundamental aims of clarity, simplicity and legibility, all images were shown free of any indication of background, setting or landscape. They have no shadows and no tones. There is no sense of light, atmosphere or receding planes. Even animals as skillfully and realistically depicted as the two giraffe of **Pl.7.2** show the colours of their coats in detail but give no indication at all of the effect of light falling on their surfaces or of shadow enhancing their forms. There is nothing in the paintings to distract from the individual image. The rigorous elimination of all but the essence of each autonomous individual image forces one to focus on it alone. This gives the art much of its peculiar strength and intensity.

There is no sense of place. Almost every figure in the art floats on the untouched, unaltered surface of the rock itself or is painted over earlier images. No images or scenes are located in a natural setting or specific locality. It has often been assumed that some motifs in Zimbabwe, especially wavy lines and large areas of dots, flecks or stippling represented scenery.[9] This seemed strengthened because the stippling is regularly associated with trees. It is almost entirely false for it will be seen in Chapter 15 that the connotations of stippled areas has nothing to do with the natural world. Trees were painted not as a background or to define a setting or landscape but in their own right as isolated objects, as perches for birds (**Fig.7.20**) or as objects of human action: bearing fruit that is being picked (e.g. **Fig.8.32 below**), or being cut down.[10] Even a ground line on which figures seem to stand was painted so rarely that, when it seems to occur, the line probably represents something else (see **Fig.8.5 below**). There is no sense of visual scale, of the actual relative sizes of different objects composing a scene or of the perspectival relationships between one object and another. Figures in a single composition may vary greatly in size (e.g **Figs.7.9 and**

7.10). Those that are the foci of the composition or engaged in an activity of particular significance may sometimes, but not always, be considerably larger than those around them (e.g. **Pls.9.1, 9.2 and 10.1 below**). Size sometimes may be a general indication of relative importance but panels that contain the work of several artists show it could also be a reflection of an artist's skill and competence. An assured artist painted on a larger scale than his imitators.

As there is no play of light or atmosphere and no visual or geometric perspective such as we are used to, so there is no sense of receding planes, of depth, of one object set in front of or behind another. There is a single visual plane. I know of a single exception, **Fig.7.21**, where the artist sought to represent embracing couples lying on their blankets. He was a master of his craft, as the carefully considered hunters beside them demonstrate, and was concerned with details: with making it clear that the blankets were made of the complete hides of animals and the careful and complete inventory of the couples' possessions. His solution to representing two superimposed planes was to hatch the blankets and thus contrast them with the solid colour of the embracing bodies. He was thus able to recognise, address and solve the basic problem of how to represent, in a single colour, one object in front of another. This represents a conceptual advance that significantly extends the principles of the art but which, it seems, was never pursued. It still was not sufficient to enable him to show the full intimacy of the embraces: the couples barely touch and do not intertwine or overlap.

Style

The principles that one can identify and abstract as the foundation of the system of representation, constitute the artistic tradition and enable us to distinguish it from all others. Consistent variations within the tradition may enable us to distinguish between the paintings of different regions and periods or even to isolate the distinctive features of particular 'schools' of painters. It is possible also to identify the work of individual artists. Close

examination of the details of paintings shows that, as artists explored the universal problems of how to represent life and movement within their common tradition and vocabulary of forms, particularly gifted individuals found a degree of consistent idiosyncratic expression.

Such variations have tempted almost every investigator to construct a sequence of successive 'styles'.[11] All work on styles so far is negated by the failures to analyse systematically or in detail either the principles of representation or the paintings that are their product. As a result, definitions of style have all been so subjective, partial, crude, gross and broad that they are unusable by any but their authors.[12] Some, like Cooke's, depend on technique, and separate, for instance, outline paintings as belonging to a distinct time and style.[13] We have shown that they are almost certainly a function of size, importance and the general principle which ensures that outline plays the overriding descriptive role in all paintings. Goodall and others followed the precedent of Breuil in his interpretations of prehistoric European cave art and isolated paintings of stiff, static creatures in which only the legs nearest the observer were shown as the earliest, though an examination of their relative positions in superimposed sequences shows this is not the case.[14] Many have adopted such generalised terms as 'Schematic', 'Impressionist' or 'Naturalistic','Classic' or 'Geometric', to categorise the art but none have defined their terms with any precision, leaving style as no more than personal feelings about the art.[15]

There is no doubt that there are consistent variations in many elements of the paintings on which style could be defined: relative proportions of different parts of the body, head shapes, facial profiles, the degree of differentiation between body parts, or the extent of movement. One of the more convincing examples of what may be a distinct localised style is shown in three sets of paintings within 30 miles of each other. The two women in **Fig.8.15 below** have a great deal of precise detailing but are most remarkable for the

proportions of their bodies, with short bulbous calves, tiny feet and heavy buttocks in contrast to the length of their thighs and upper bodies. The knees seem as a result almost grotesquely near the feet. Two male pipers, **Fig.9.21**, are painted close to them: here the length of the thighs is particularly exaggerated. In **Fig.10.3 below**, three gatherers, three hunters and a recumbent figure all have the same strange proportions. These are simpler paintings and the length of their bodies is made even odder by the lack of the curves, inflections, heavy buttocks and bags of the first two women: differences sufficient to indicate that they are not by the same artist. The men and women in a much more complex scene in **Fig.15.24 below** share these distinctive proportions but the artist here has given them even straighter and more slab-like torsoes. The parameters or consistency of such variations have not been tested. Some may have a degree of regional and temporal significance but more probably result from preferences of leading painters who, through imitation, became the basis of limited and short-lived schools. There was sufficient interaction between schools that the styles of each were fluid and changing and, depending on the attributes chosen, one could define many different schools. It remains to be seen if any graphic traits coincide with each other sufficiently to distinguish region from region or period from period. In such a study it seems likely that one would discover many more continuities of stylistic quirks through both time and space than localised idiosyncracies and that any stylistic criteria and categories would be to a greater or lesser degree the arbitrary creations of the researcher. This is, of course, simply another example of the perennial problem of those archaeological typologists who presuppose that the makers of all artefacts seek to attain some standardised ideal form, some stylistic norm, and who therefore define their classifications by these standards: a process that is now viewed with suspicion even in southern Africa where it was long seen and practised as the main business of archaeology.

One of the most obvious features of any substantial panel of paintings, including those in the largest and most important caves, is the great variation in skills of the different painters who contributed to the composition: skills in observation, in selection of significant detail, in the control of the application of paint, in the delicacy of line, in the amount of detail they included, in the clarity, conviction and control of outline, in the force with which they could convey intention, in the creativity with which they could adapt basic principles to enrich their imagery, in the sense of composition, form and pattern. Assured works by artists in full control of every element in their art contrast with many paintings that are uncertain and rudimentary sketches, small stiff figures whose limbs and bodies are formed by thick and uneven lines determined by the accidents of brush, paint and rock surface, where the painter has had little or no control over his medium, where proportions are unconvincing and distortions purposeless **(Figs. 7.22 and 7.23)**.

Such paintings can be found interspersed with the most skilled work and are generally imitative of it. In **Fig.7.9** four large figures are surrounded and interspersed with smaller, stiffer, less detailed and less assured figures, stilted and unconvincing, but which echo the postures and gestures established by the first large figures. Both contrast with the three hunters on the left whose actions are both convincing and assured. Much the same range is present in **Fig.7.10**.

Fig.7.24 contains a similar variety of 'styles'. The largest figure on the extreme left has little form, movement or reality. Over it have been painted thin stick-like figures with no shape or flesh to their limbs but in animated movement and with vividly expressive gestures. At the top centre are two carefully considered elongated figures. The smaller figures below them are significantly less well formed but still clear, purposeful and probably immediately recognizable by the artist's audience as engaged in specific and identifiable actions. The group of small figures, bottom

left, are sketches without detail or attributes and with only their grouping to suggest their purpose. The animals range from the kudu cow at the top centre whose outline and elements not only establish its specific identity quickly and certainly but convey something of the animal's grace and beauty to small and generalised antelope and even smaller and completely unidentifiable creatures below the kudu reduced almost to blobs.

This range of accomplishment within a single panel is in clear and obvious contradiction to the fallacy, widely reiterated and believed, that only the most skilled painters were permitted to paint on the walls of the large caves or major panels.[16] The widest possible range of skills can be recognized in almost any significant grouping of paintings. This coincides with Kung practices.[17] Kung children learn through imitating or participating as far as they are able in the activities of their parents: they are as far as possible never excluded from adult activity. They play at hunting or gathering; they listen to adults exchanging stories; they join in the early stages of all communal dancing. Participation is generally encouraged. It is in this way that they receive their education. There is no aspect of Kung life that is exclusive or esoteric. The same appears to have applied to painting: painters with entirely different abilities added images to a composition but, as in trancing or healing, only a few of them chose to concentrate and develop their skills to such an extent that they achieved unusual mastery of their craft and can be recognized as outstanding artists.

Vitality, observation

The fact that painting seems to manifest a set of principles that achieve the maximum 'legibility' of a comparatively small range of elements rather than the reproduction of reality does not deny the vitality of the art. It did not reduce images to standardised stereotypes. It patently did not result in monotonous repetition of simplistic motifs or visual cliches. The canon may have allowed the representation of only a limited range of activities and

demanded extreme simplicity, but these limitations were a stimulus and not a handicap, as they are to all creative artists in all artistic traditions.

In the paintings of the animals that most interested the artists, the endless variety of the imagery is a continual pleasure. Most animals only stand or walk. Some are recumbent; a few browse, graze or move at a trot or canter. Some stand calmly; others are alert, scenting the air for danger. Elephants may lift their trunks and spread their ears, investigating intruders, while their calves retire quietly between them (**Fig.6.1 above**).

The skilled artist seems to us to have been able, within the conventions, to express character primarily through the acute observation and accurate reproduction of the essence of a range of characteristic movements. These could be 'distorted' and 'exaggerated' to the point of caricature but their 'message' was thus emphasised and enhanced rather than obscured.

Aesthetic responses

There seems little doubt that the composition of the family group in **Fig.7.25** was carefully considered from the purely visual point of view, to produce an image of considerable beauty, balance, symmetry, complexity and power. It is a demonstration that skilled artists were concerned with aesthetic values within what may otherwise have seemed rigid and inhibiting conventions and used these to reinforce the impact of their paintings: in this case to form a composition that brings the individual members of a family into a single powerful unity.

Artists were also fully capable of idiosyncratic inventions to further personal artistic values. **Fig.7.26** seems to represent a bird; many paintings of birds, especially flying ones, have grotesque semi-human forms (see **Figs.12.13, 13.8** and **15.15 below**). Here the head, crest, body, outspread wings and tail seem discernible, with the neck formed of separate lines, lines from the mouth and four legs. But the artist has transformed his image into a design in which delight in delicate linear complexity almost

smothers the content.

The zebra in **Fig.7.27**, now faded and incomplete, is primarily a decorative and aesthetic response to the way that, particularly with a zebra, line could create pattern and form. The weight of the lines of head and body are contrasted; the mane becomes an extension of the patterning of the neck. The natural stripes of the head have been modified for artistic reasons alone. This artist was a master of line as the modulations of the outline of head and neck demonstrate: but he was also confident enough to break with fundamental principle and dispense with outline almost entirely, as he dispensed with the ears and possibly legs. An accomplished artist grasped an opportunity to use line to express his aesthetic delight in pattern for its own sake and developed his imagery creatively and not just to describe an object.

Every painting was the creation of an individual human being, each with very different talents, insight, penetration, imagination, inventiveness, creativity, experience, competence, confidence and commitment. But all the paintings embodied coherent principles, rules and conventions. We must work towards an understanding of the system of formal representation and this understanding will make it easier to understand content. The system was comprehensive but not exclusive. It was widespread and long-lived enough to show all sorts of idiosyncracies. The oddity, exception, and quirk of perception or representation was always present. Every rule was occasionally broken and every statement about rules and principles requires qualification.

NOTES

1. Gombrich, 1960.
2. Pager, 1973a: 329-31.
3. Frobenius, 1931b: 18.
4. Goodall, 1959: 98.
5. Lewis-Williams and Dowson, 1989: 100.

6. Dart, 1937; Lee and Woodhouse, 1970: 65. It is a minor curiosity of these popular interpretations that while paintings of an erect penis are always interpreted as illustrations of a reality, women's equally erect and protruding breasts are never interpreted in the same way; and this discrepancy is never mentioned or discussed.

7. Pager, 1973; Vinnicombe, 1976.

8. Lee, 1976: 127.

9. Goodall, 1959: 62-75; Lewis-Williams, 1983a: 31.

10. Goodall, 1959: 77.

11. The views of Burkitt, Frobenius, Breuil and Cooke on styles have already been discussed in Chapter 3.

12. Vinnicombe, 1967: 129, found 'style' a "vexatious term". Lewis-Williams, 1987a: 96, considered "in southern African rock art research, style has proved the largest red herring, its pursuit the greatest time-waster".

13. Cooke, 1959: 124-33.

14. Goodall, 1959: 3-4.

15. Jones, 1949: 61-2; Rudner and Rudner, 1970.

16. Cooke, 1959: 160; 1969: 25.

17. Katz, 1982: 28, 118, 142.

8. HUNTERS AND GATHERERS

Physical characteristics

Paintings of people seldom show with unambiguous clarity the physical peculiarities popularly attributed to the San: not surprisingly, because these are, as we have seen, as largely artificial a construct as the concept of a San race itself. Certainly not all San shared these features: the Masarwa in and near Zimbabwe at the turn of the century least of all.[1] There is little indication of enlarged buttocks or thighs in paintings of women. An inward curvature of the lower spine and a protruding belly are much more common features of paintings of both men and women. Men are commonly shown with what appears an erect or semi-erect penis but, as we have seen, this can be explained as determined by a convention of the art which demanded that every element of an object be shown free of its background so that it can be delineated in full and in outline; womens' breasts were depicted in the same way. There is nothing in the paintings to suggest the stature, pigmentation, hair or facial features of the figures.

Hunters

When anyone thinks of 'Bushman paintings' the sort of image that springs to mind is usually very like that shown in **Pl.8.1:** nine hunters striding along, naked and unadorned save for the bow and bundle of arrows that each carries. They form a coherent, purposeful and unified group, in a line, close together, facing the same way, in almost identical postures and each delineated individually and complete with only the slightest overlaps. The object of their march is never indicated. Variety is kept to the minimum and, in this case, is only apparent in the ways they carry their weapons: in front or behind them, under their arms or resting on their shoulders. After their weapons, a secondary focus is on their masculinity, with their penises projecting clear of their bodies and with a strange but distinct line across each.[2]

Such hunters are the most numerous of all images in the

paintings. Several sets can be found in almost every substantial panel of paintings and illustrations of single hunters and groups of hunters occur throughout this work. **Fig.1.4** includes, at the top, a group of 13 men;[3] though they show no sign of purposeful or directed activity, only four lack both weapons and hunting bags. At the bottom of this panel, there are two detailed hunters, both by the same artist: one kneels and aims an arrow, the other runs towards him, holding arrows in one hand and a bow with arrow inserted in the other.[4] In a few large sets of paintings however, hunters are only a minor component: for instance, in the extremely varied group of paintings illustrated in **Fig.1.2** there are no bands of hunters at all, while in another complex and varied panel, **Fig.1.1**, hunters are only shown singly and have a very minor role.

In the panel shown in **Fig.12.24 below**, five hunters at the bottom left run together in the same direction, again displaying every detail of their weaponry and running with great speed, their legs almost straight out and so wide apart that they are almost parallel to the ground: a position that seems to express the essence of the strength, eagerness, fearlessness and energy of the hunter as the hunt reaches its climax: the epitome of the most cliched conception of 'Bushman paintings'.[5] In the centre of the panel shown in **Fig.15.26 below** two hunters run and wave their weapons in very much the same way. At the bottom right of the panel shown in **Fig.12.23 below**, beneath the two large kudu, there are at least eight hunters by different hands displaying their weapons but scarcely forming any coherent scene group or scene.

Three hunters in **Fig.8.1** are seated and two more stand on either side of them. All have their weapons and bags shown in careful detail beside them. Three hunters in **Fig.8.2** have a bow and three arrows laid beside them. One has his bag on his shoulder, two hold theirs and one has his laid beside his weapons.[6] **Fig.8.3** shows four hunters by three different artists, all with either weapons or hunting bag. One aims his bow but there is no indication what he is

shooting. Quite often single hunters raise and aim their loaded bows: a summation of the key moment of a hunter's action. Some of them are in movement, as in **Fig.8.3**; others kneel, as one of the hunters at the bottom of **Fig. 1.4 above**, and others adopt the more characteristic stance of a San hunter as he releases his arrow, crouched, legs bent and apart, body vertical and bow raised and aimed, as on the right of **Fig.12.2 below**. In all these, it seems it is the action, not the event, that is important and that it helps to define the subject.

All paintings of hunters seem particularly concerned to present detailed inventories of their equipment. Hunters wear no clothes and generally carry a large bow in one hand, at least as long as the upper half of the body and generally a great deal longer. There is no doubt that the sizes of at least some bows were greatly exaggerated: that of the hunter in **Fig.7.22 above** is larger than he is and the line of little white hunters within a circle in **Fig.15.17 below** carry dark bows that are almost twice their height. So clearly not all relative sizes are realistic: size was used as a measure of importance and his bow was a hunter's most important possession. Nevertheless, it does seem that even in the most straightforward paintings, bows were generally larger than bows used by any San groups in recent times.[7]

Hunters also carry arrows in one or both hands. These are generally as long as the arm, straight uninflected lines, flightless and headless, with the tip simply brought to a point. Most have no indication that they had separate components. None is notched at the butt. Some show a clear thickening of the shaft, at the end held lower and closer to the body and hence the butt rather than the head. This thickening usually takes the form of an elongated oval with a rounded end: this is particularly clear on the arrows in **Fig.8.3**. Some butts are asymmetrical and hollow e.g. in **Fig.8.1**. These must represent a form of flight but there is never sufficient detail to recognise what they were made of. In one panel alone, **Fig.8.4**, the flights of all the arrows carried by the hunters have what look like triangular or

forked ends attached to the shaft with a large blob of gum or mastic. In a single instance, shown in **Fig.8.2**, the hunter on the left is clearly binding an arrowhead to its shaft with twine. A small proportion of arrows are painted with extraordinarily large and elaborate spiked, forked and barbed heads in a limited range of shapes that certainly could not have been made with bone, wood or stone (e.g. in **Figs.8.1 and 8.3**). Even if they were made of metal, a contradiction of all other dating evidence, they would have been too unwieldy to travel far or penetrate an animal. As we shall see in Chapter 12, there are telling reasons to suppose that these arrowheads are not items of hunting equipment at all but represent supernatural 'arrows of potency'.

Hunters usually carry a bag slung high on one shoulder and resting under the armpit (e.g. the bottom right figure in **Fig.8.3**). They are small, long and narrow and the neck could probably be drawn closed and tied. They have a single long sling, one end attached to the neck and the other to the bottom of the bag. The lower part of the body of the bag was often decorated with long tassels. Usually several arrows and a fly whisk with a short handle and long tail are visible protruding from the mouth of the bag: all are visible in the bags laid beside the hunters in **Fig.8.1.**[8] Where it is possible to tell, the arrows are inserted head down in the bags: two of the four hunters in **Fig.8.2** carry their hunting bags by the looped strap and the flighted ends of three arrows protrude from each.

There are paintings of hunters with long, rigid, cylindrical quivers with arrows in them, slung from their shoulders and across their bodies in place of the shoulder bag (**Fig.8.3**, right). These may have been, like some San quivers, small tubes of bark covered in hide.[9] Paintings of quivers are not nearly as common as those of hunting bags and may be more concentrated in the south-west of Zimbabwe. The preference for quiver or hunting bag may have therefore have some cultural, ethnic or temporal significance.

Hunters can be shown in groups of up to thirty: the large groups in **Figs.12.7 and 12.8 below** both originally

consisted of almost exactly this number. Often different bands approach each other. Let us analyse what appears to be one such assemblage of hunters. **Fig.8.5**, under the overhang of an isolated boulder on the crest of a bare granite dome with no other paintings near it, shows 42 men: one of the largest known groupings of people forming what seems a single composition. They can be divided into several groups. At the bottom there is a line of 12 hunters, facing right, the majority armed with bows and arrows though one holds only a whisk and short stick and another only a whisk. The only detail on any arrow is on those belonging to the third hunter from the front: the heads of the arrows in his hand and the head of the one in his bow have large forked heads. Only one carries a clear shoulder bag. The majority adopt a curious almost sitting stance, leaning backward with their legs together and generally slightly bent.

Confronting this group is a line of ten hunters with a line of four more above them who seem to belong to the same group. Unlike the first group, most are striding along or at least standing more upright and all are armed with bows and arrows, though none have shoulder bags. Two or three also carry whisks. The leading figure is the largest and holds arrows with broad, transverse, triangular heads. A figure in the top row aims an arrow with a large transverse triangular head and side barb and holds similar arrows in his other hand. The last figure has a similar arrow though, having lost the transverse line, it appears forked.

Above and to the left of these two groups, a third line of 14 men approach from the left. Six of the seven at the rear are armed with bows and arrows. One aims his and seems to draw his bow cord. Two have arrows with triangular heads. The leading figures are noticeably smaller and sketchier and probably by another, later hand. Five carry short thick staffs or sticks; one holds a fly whisk in each hand and one or two are unarmed. Two long thin lines flow from the backs of the heads of seven of these figures. This group faces the remaining two figures: a hunter holding a stick and with bow and arrows in his shoulder bag. He adopts the same position

as the figures in the first group and in this instance it can be seen more convincingly as a sitting posture. Behind him is a figure with bow and whisk.

This set of hunters, probably by at least two hands, is superimposed on some tiny figures by other artists: one upside down with legs bent and apart under the rear of the first group of hunters; one armed with bow and arrows but crouched with his arms stiff behind him; and one with large ears floating extended above the centre of the lower frieze. A dead antelope, upside down and head twisted, has been painted over the hunters. Other figures in the panel include a small gatherer with her stick and aprons, top left; a poorly drawn carnivore at the bottom, next to a small antelope by another artist; tsessebe and zebra. A long line, curved to follow the undulation of the main frieze of hunters provides an unusual base to the figures.

This large composition is focussed on hunters with unusually few distractions from this theme. Nevertheless, there are many unusual elements in the stances and accoutrements of the hunters: the lack of bags and the many figures holding their whisks; the occasional large arrowheads - 'arrows of potency'; the unusual number of men with sticks; the static or semi-seated postures of so many; the almost ubiquitous lines rising from their heads and the other long lines flowing down from some of them. These features will in fact later be explained as indicators of dancers rather than hunters. There also appears to be an element of confrontation between the groups, and even possible slight allusions to different status in the size, detail and elaborate weaponry of a few of the figures in the forefront of their groups. Despite strong initial impressions therefore, this painting is not just a straightforward image of hunting.

A few paintings show men carrying a single short thick stick or club or an oval object best explained as a stone missile (e.g. the figure in **Fig.7.13 above** and the central running hunter in **Fig.15.26 below**). Oval objects are also shown hafted to make a club or axe with a heavy stone head

(e.g in **Figs.12.14 and 13.24 below**). These forms of clubs can be seen in use in some of the few scenes of a small creature actually being attacked. The attackers can scarcely be defined as hunters: they lack any of the hunter's usual weapons, nor would they need them. Almost all are small sketches with little of the careful attention to details of the friezes of hunters. In **Fig.8.6**, a man runs after and reaches out to a dog-like animal with a stick or catches its tail and prepares to strike it with a short club. **Fig.11.3** includes a similar incident with a man running towards a small standing buck and raising a club with a heavy hafted head. In **Fig.8.7**, one of the few paintings of people with their quarry which occupies a central position and where the subjects are carefully and expertly painted, two men have entered a disproportionately large burrow with an antbear at the end. The one nearest to the animal crawls towards it, stretched out flat on his stomach. He and his companion are not armed though a long stick has been left at the entrance. Four of the group wait outside: two sitting near the burrow entrance have sticks and the figure furthest away holds a short stick and raises a heavy club. In the sketch shown in **Fig.8.8**, a man again lies enclosed in a long narrow space and pokes a long stick towards the end of it but his prey is not shown. In **Fig.8.9**, two lean men without equipment except a stick, crouch and poke a stick down a burrow towards an unidentifiable animal with a short body, stocky legs, heavy head and no tail, possibly a hyrax or cane rat.[10] But these are unusual paintings, most of them painted with little care or skill, anecdotal references to subsidiary and insignificant events in the food quest and scarcely representative of the main forms of hunting.

The most striking feature of paintings of hunters is how seldom there is a focus of the hunters' movement, attention or activity: they are almost never shown with their quarry.[11] The range of images of hunters is extraordinarily restricted in other ways as well. Almost none of the activities that are a basic part of hunting or ancillary to it is ever depicted. There are virtually no scenes of

hunters making, preparing or repairing their weapons. The hunter tying an arrowhead to its shaft in **Fig.8.2** is a most unusual exception. So is a scene in **Fig.8.4** where, in the midst of many other more active hunters, two sit or bend over their sets of arrows laid out before them, apparently checking or counting them. They also seem to be exchanging an arrow each: a striking reminder of the Kung practice of exchanging arrows before a hunt so that no one hunter has sole rights over the eventual prey.[12] There are no paintings of snares or traps or pitfalls. There are no hunters using camouflage or disguises. Very few hunters are shown crouched in what looks like a stalking position, their bodies bent horizontal to the ground. There are even fewer scenes of men ambushing, tracking, pursuing, attacking or killing any of the larger antelope which must have been the most desirable and probably commonest quarry. There is never any indication of any of the disasters that can befall a hunter. No-one is shown skinning or butchering an animal, sharing out the meat or carrying it back to the camp. **Fig.8.10** shows hunters transporting bulky objects; but, in the one clear figure, his load is certainly not meat, and this is in any case another very exceptional image. Paintings of hunters are not illustrations of hunting as an activity or event and give no indication of how hunts were conducted.

As significant as the many aspects of a hunter's life that are not painted are the extremely similar and repetitive attitudes of the men making up groups of hunters. There is little sense of individuals interacting with each other as they carry out the many different cooperative actions that are essential parts of collective hunting activities. The emphasis is on the hunting band as an undifferentiated unit. The individual hunter is reduced to an anonymous generalised concept, divorced from all the everyday realities and multiplicity of individual tasks of a hunting life. Extending this, there is even less expression or sense of the interaction between the hunter and his prey, of the relationship between man and animal, of the ambiguities and

tensions created in killing animals with which man has a close and essential relationship. The artists were clearly well able to show any aspect of hunting in all its dramatic reality. They very rarely did so. The canon of the art precluded such scenes except in very particular circumstances.

Gatherers

Gatherers were painted much less often than hunters. They are, nevertheless, an easily recognizable minor theme in the art. They are never shown in mixed groups with hunters or indeed with any men: their roles were entirely separated. Gatherers contrast with hunters in several ways. They stand and walk sedately and never take up the animated postures of the hunters. No more that four or five are ever shown together in contrast to the frequent large groups of hunters.

While men wear nothing, women are usually shown with an apron hanging from their waists and covering their buttocks, often dropping as low as their knees (**Figs.8.11-14, 8.24**). Less often they have a second and generally smaller apron at the front. Women often also tied tassels to their upper arms or calves (**Fig.8.11**) and perhaps occasionally over their breasts. In **Fig.8.3**, the single gatherer, top right, has a large apron hanging from her waist at the back and a smaller one at the front, tassels tied around her chest under her arms, tassels on her upper arms and waves a thick stick: but for the absence of a bag, all the typical indicators of a gatherer.

Gatherers generally carry a long straight stick such as Kung women use for grubbing up plants and roots and extracting rodents from their burrows.[13] Sometimes this is the only attribute that women are given in the paintings. The only accoutrements of the line of five tall women in **Fig.7.10 above** are the sticks they carry: they have no bags, aprons or tassels. The economy with which they are depicted shows most convincingly how paintings could be reduced to the simplest and most telling attributes, to a minimum of defining features. They contrast with the small figure added

in between them and imitating them and the crested, tasselled and aproned dancer above them on the left.

Gatherers have distinctive bags: large, round and with two handles that could hang from the shoulders and rest in the small of the back (see **Fig.13.12below**). The complete skins of small animals are tied round the chests of some women and swing empty and free behind them (**Figs.8.12 and 8.13**): these are probably capes like those which Kung women tie round neck and waist and use to carry their baby, food or possessions, containers rather than clothing.[14] Some are shown tied securely low on the back, the straps formed by the legs of the animal showing in front of the body: **Figs.8.14 and 8.15**. Sometimes the upper part of a child protrudes (**Fig.8.13** and the figure on the elephant's rear leg in **Fig.12.23 below**); others contain what seem to be small antelope, to judge by their large ears (**Fig.8.15**). More generally there is no indication of their contents.

The complexities that can accumulate around gatherers are apparent in **Fig.8.15**. Both have large round containers tied round their bodies in the middle of their backs, the two pairs of straps protruding in front of their chests. Both carry long digging sticks and both wear tasselled aprons tied round their waists, falling front and back. Their buttocks are large and rounded; their backs curve forward and are exaggeratedly elongated; the belly is low and protruding and the navel is clearly shown; their legs and particularly their calves are short and stout but well shaped and their feet are tiny. Their breasts are no more than minimal indicators of gender. Although these two images seem to emphasise the lumbar curve, enlarged buttocks and thighs popularly associated with San women, in unusual completeness and detail, the positions of the knees and size of the feet are clearly not realistic. The images are thus more the result of the painter's style than an attempt to depict actual anatomic peculiarities,

Additional elements complicate matters. Unexplained lines or tassels stream from head, armpits, stomach and bag - the latter cannot simply be the tassels shown in other

paintings of bags for here they emerge from towards the top and not from the bottom. The bag of the rear figure also has a long zig-zag line coming out of the top. The bag of the leading figure has the head of a small animal protruding from it - within the realms of realistic representation - but also what seem to be birds perch on lines coming out of the bag and there is another bird perched on her arm. Yet another small animal seems to float between the two figures. The leading figure has a pair of discs sticking up from her right arm and the rear figure has similar forms in front of her chest. She also holds a plant or flower. These figures are both gatherers and more than gatherers - as the numerous unexplained attributes attached to their bodies and accoutrements attest.

In **Fig.10.3 below**, three gatherers are placed next to three hunters, all in an even stranger 'style', with greatly elongated bodies and thighs and proportionately stubby calves and tiny feet and heads. But their attributes remain clear - sticks and large bags in the small of the back for the gatherers and hunting bags on their shoulders and, probably, weapons in one hand for the hunters.

As with hunters, paintings of women are almost entirely limited to portrayals of fully equipped gatherers setting out for their tasks rather than carrying them out. Just as there are almost no illustrations of hunters at what would seem to be the most significant moments of their work - encountering their prey - there are no illustrations of gatherers amongst plants, let alone picking fruit, uprooting plants or actually using their digging sticks. As there are almost no paintings of men engaged in the many activities ancillary to or outside hunting, there are few if any illustrations of women building shelters, collecting firewood, lighting or tending fires, cooking, eating, preparing hides, sewing or decorating aprons or capes, making bags, suckling or tending children or any of the multitude of other San female domestic chores. Rare paintings show women sitting within a semicircular line that represents a windbreak or shelter and grinding or pounding plants between two stones, often with numbers of both

prepared and unprepared plants, tubers or a roots beside them (**Fig.8.16**): a tiny and unrepresentative sample of women's usual tasks.

In **Fig.8.17** five women are shown at the top, seated with their bags and sticks beside them. Three have two large bags, each with four lines hanging from it: the legs of the original animal hide or straps to tie it to the back. Each has one or two smaller bags with a handle and three have still smaller bags with narrow necks from which fly whisks protrude. Both the latter types may belong to the absent menfolk and are decorated with five tassels, two at each side and one hanging from the centre of the bottom. One woman, on the extreme right, has three of the smallest bags and a small round pouch; another has a complete skin, perhaps a carrying cape. All have extremely unusual black stripes down their bodies and across their arms; and both upper arms and thighs are thickened, cutting sharply back in a straight line above the elbows and knees, almost as if they were wearing garments with sleeves and legs. In contrast to this wealth of careful detail describing equipment and adornment, the women themselves are entirely inactive, doing nothing recognizable or specific. A small figure standing among them, presumably one of their children, has the same form as they do. Below, five women and a smaller figure, adorned in the same way and so perhaps the same group, walk in file. They have no sticks and only one has a bag tied to her back. These women are scarcely a group of gatherers but the two groups certainly constitute a statement about women and encampment.

As well as being gatherers, women were mothers and, though significantly less often than their portrayals as gatherers, they are sometimes shown in this role. A child, with her own digging stick, accompanies the gatherers in **Fig.8.14**. Another child stands between the two women in **Fig.8.18**, wears tassels on her arms like them, and reaches towards her mother's breast. More striking still, at the bottom of **Fig.1.2 above**, a child opens its mouth to suckle at its mother's breast.

Domesticity and motherhood seem a focus of **Fig.8.19**.

Seven mothers relax, at least five of them reaching out to, sitting or lying beside their children. Some of the children, most unusually, approach the proportions of real children and, again most unusually, play with their own possessions: miniature, toy bows and arrows. The role of women as mothers is deliberately contrasted here with that of men as hunters for, on an adjoining surface seven hunters attack a large bovine-like creature with their bows and arrows (see **Fig.12.12 below**).

This composition is exceptional. In almost all other paintings, children are generally recognizable only by their relative size: they are small but almost always have the proportions of an adult, most often a very slender adult. They are scarcely real children: there are no babies, no tubby crawling, suckling infants; no youngsters playing, running or shouting; no children embracing their parents. Images of children seem once more to denote concepts, an essence rather than everyday reality.

Families and communities

Men, women and children are shown together in paintings that seem to focus on and celebrate another two of the most significant aspects of human society, the family and community. They are often some of the largest, most elaborate and moving compositions in the corpus. The figures are carefully grouped so that the different units can be distinguished. The family is represented in its simplest, nuclear form: father and mother with one or, at most, two children. The parents sit together or the woman kneels and the man lies on his back, sometimes with one knee up and the other leg straight, a graphic device to indicate that the person is relaxed but not asleep or unconscious. If there is a child, this is almost always shown between its parents (see **Fig.7.25 above** and the strikingly similar groups at the top right of **Fig.8.20**, the bottom left of **Fig.8.21**, and the centre of **Fig.10.6 below**). As before, the way the theme of family is manifested is severely restricted. There are, for instance, no paintings of pregnancy or childbirth. All is idealised: nowhere are there illustrations of sickness,

deformity or the ravages of age.

Fig.8.20 is a domestic scene with 14 figures on the wall of a major painted cave. The rock surface is unusually dark, so are the pigments, and both are covered in dust so the details are difficult to distinguish or copy. Two sets of parents have a child between them while two children at the base also seem to have a parent on each side, leaving two childless couples, top left and centre, and a single hunter at the lower left. The men all have their weapons beside them. Digging sticks and two-handled bags enormously exaggerated in size, and, in one case, three gourds, are placed beside the women.

A second camp scene in the same cave, with 28 figures, is shown in **Fig.8.21.** It offers several contrasts to the first. Two or three couples have two children and two have a child each, two mothers also have a child each and there are three childless couples and a childless single man. The equipment is more detailed and various: bows, bundles of arrows and single-handled shoulder bags filled with arrows are placed beside the men. Large, though not exaggerated, two-handled bags, a variety of very small bags, gourds and possible containers made of the intact hides of small animals lie near each woman.

These two compositions typify the way that domestic groups or camps are treated. Each separate family can be identified as well as the childless couples and unattached men and women. They all have their possessions around them. Characteristic postures denoting ease and comfort are well represented: the sitting and kneeling women, the reclining men. No one is engaged in any specific task. The sense of relaxation, intimacy, domesticity and content conveyed by these large compositions, make the community as powerful and comprehensive an image as the hunter, gatherer or family. The intricacy of the compositions, the variety of postures, the interactions between figures, their vitality, and the detail of the inventories mask, at first, the restricted and rigid underlying structure and conventions that determine the form of such scenes.

Fig.1.1 above has a large section of paintings by different artists which seems to focus on women and families to the virtual exclusion of hunters. The family in **Fig.7.25 above**, the line of gatherers in **Fig.8.14** and the women with a child in **Fig.8.18** all come from it and in the same panel several more family groups can be distinguished. Strangely, none of them has any possessions. This concentration on particular themes in particular panels, continued over long periods and in different ways, is characteristic of the art and offers confirmation that we have correctly or at least partly correctly identified some of the key themes.

Intimacy and sexuality are celebrated in occasional paintings of couples embracing. Such images created considerable graphic problems, for the conventions of the art did not allow for the representation of bodies holding each other closely, intertwined and overlapping: such attitudes were too complex for easy legibility. The problems were resolved most satisfactorily in **Fig.7.21 above:** seven couples, whose hide blankets are shown by hatching, lie close together in intimate embraces, their limbs entwined, yet a narrow space still separates each body, allowing for easy recognition. Smaller figures with the proportions of slender, almost ethereal adults lie beside the couples: presumably their children. In another set of paintings, recumbent people and their hide blankets are superimposed on lines forming an oval, almost a pictograph of family life: **Fig.15.12 below.**

Most of the few paintings of physical intimacy or sexual intercourse belong to the corpus of small, poorly drawn sketches that we have discussed already, peripheral both to the panels on which they appear and to the canon of the art. They avoid rather than solve the graphic problems posed by the subject. Most often, couples lie down facing each other but well apart and hold out their hands to each other: e.g. **Figs.8.22, centre, and 8.23.** Another set of paintings shows the heads of people protruding from the ends of amorphous shapes that may be coverings or blankets: **Pl.8.3.** Otherwise, sexuality scarcely intrudes. The startling **Fig.8.24**

illustrates a group of men with grossly enlarged sexual organs both coupling and indulging in more egregious sexual practices: a further example of the direct, idiosyncratic and sometimes earthy quality of the sketches that run as a minor counterpoint to the main themes and demonstrate that no artistic tradition is ever kept entirely within the bounds of its main concerns, canon and conventions.

Possessions

As we have already seen in **Figs.8.1, 8.2, 8.17 and 8.19-22**, an important feature of the human imagery is the care with which the possessions and equipment of people are systematically delineated. All the people in a camp often have all their belongings beside them. Every item is shown clearly and separately, part of a precise and detailed inventory.

Generally, men have their bows, arrows and small, narrow, shoulder or hunting bags, containing more arrows and a fly whisk (e.g. **Fig.8.1**). Women have their digging sticks and large, round, two-handled bags or bags of whole skins with the four legs used to tie them to the back hanging below them. In contrast to the men's bags, the contents of women's bags are seldom shown. As in **Fig.8.19**, some women have even larger and rounder bags with one or two wide attachments coming out of the top which may be water bags - with the wide attachments representing the spout. Women also often have several small round rigid vessels with narrow upright necks, presumably gourds and possibly water containers. Men and more often women might also own small round, triangular or squarish pouches or purses with short handles and frequently adorned with tassels, that were carried and not slung. Bags are often carefully slung on horizontal poles tied to uprights set in the ground or on curved withies (see **Fig.9.15 below**).

Fig.7.21 above includes one of the most careful, precise and detailed inventories of an unusually extensive range of possessions, belonging to the men of the seven families shown lying on their blankets: each is grouped separately beside the hides on which they lie with their families. Each has a

bow; arrows; a wide bag with handles and tassels filled with long arrows; a long narrow bag with long decorative tails and a strap at the neck, containing smaller arrows and two fly whisks; a small round pouch tied tightly at the neck with the lines of the objects it contains protruding from it; a gourd with a long narrow neck; and a small spherical object.

The main possessions of the women in **Fig.8.19** are the very large round objects with a single 'spout' and no handles; they also have very clearly delineated triangular bags. The men and women in **Figs.8.20** and **8.21** have a more usual inventory: bows; a bundle of arrows; small bags with a narrow top or opening and a single handle; oval pouches tied tight at the mouth, bulky two-handled gathering bags and several gourds with little or no necks. At the bottom left of **Fig.1.2 above**, a woman without any belongings sits with a child standing beside her and reaching up open-mouthed to feed at a breast. Beside them are a bow, quiver and hunting bag with shoulder sling and whisk: possessions used to denote the absent father. **Fig.8.25** is a cameo of the belongings of a man and woman: her bag with straps, gourds, and fruit; and his bow, bundle of arrows and shoulder bags with things sticking out of them. The owners themselves are dispensed with. It seems that men and women could be represented solely by their possessions.

Personal possessions thus fulfilled a significant defining role in paintings. The shapes of bags were a ready means of establishing the sex of the owner but the purpose in showing them so carefully seems to have been more specific and complex than this. It was not to do with status, unless it was to emphasise the egalitarian nature of the society, for everyone in any particular group owns almost exactly the same types and numbers of items. It was also not to do with individuality for everyone owned the same things as the others of the same sex. Perhaps the responsibilities of adulthood were established through and equated with possessions. Possessions may also have served to identify distinct communities or even ethnic groups for there may be regional differences in the types and shapes of the bags that

people owned.

Further activities

A small number of paintings depicts a further limited range of human activities. There are paintings of a form of fighting and others of people lifting long straight poles that recur sufficiently regularly for them to be considered significant subjects. In **Fig.8.26** two tasselled women confront each other, leaning inwards with arms outstretched, their bags and sticks laid aside behind them. In **Fig.8.27** a man with a club has overpowered, holds the leg and is about to strike a figure who has fallen backwards and stretches out his arms and fingers in alarm or despair. In **Fig.8.28** two men raise clubs at each other, but one also catches hold of the other's arm. The same happens with two hunters in **Fig.8.29.** Their equipment is laid aside behind them and a third hunter raises hands with outstretched fingers, in a gesture commenting on what he sees. The same sort of fight occurs between figures with animal heads and tails in **Fig.13.24 below.** In the three latter fights, the figures hold each other even while they fight, making the contests more stylised than real and seeming to indicate that the adversaries are, despite their antagonisms, nevertheless bound together. These scenes thus appear to be comments on the essential unity of members of a community, whatever their differences, and the undesirability or even impossibility of enmity between them.

Next to the opponents in **Fig.8.29**, the same artist has painted two hunters carrying a long pole, one at each end. Again a third hunter stands behind them and makes the same gesture with outspread fingers as the one watching the fighters. The only efficient or easy way to carry such an unwieldy object is for two people to work together: it is a much more difficult task for a person on his own. This scene may thus point to the merits of cooperation. The juxtapositioning of the two scenes thus appears deliberately to contrast cooperation with hostility and hence broaden and reinforce the message about the merits of group unity. **Fig.8.30** illustrates the same point. Broad social messages,

derived from the exploration of significant features of human life as the artists perceived it, which are inherent in all paintings, are writ small and almost anecdotally in these illustrations but in this way they perhaps become clearer to those who stand outside the artists' culture. They also support our interpretation that simple generalised social messages are the purposes inherent in the main body of the paintings.

Occasional small sketches appear so idiosyncratic, unimportant and light-hearted that they seem to have little significance beyond personal amusement and anecdote. In the vivid little cameo of **Fig.8.31**, two hunters sitting down with their weapons beside them converse, pointing and gesticulating animatedly at each other. In **Fig.8.32** a pot-bellied hunter, with his bag still hanging from his shoulder but his equipment laid aside, picks fruit from a tree, so heavily laden that it must fulfill all his dreams, and puts one in his open mouth. In **Fig.8.33** a man runs away, his arms raised in agitation, from a fearsome creature on four legs with the head of an animal and the body of a man. **Fig.8.34** sketches two men holding the same horizontal bar with both hands and with their bodies raised upside down into the air: swinging, very like gymnasts, somersaulting or resisting weightlessness and being floated or blown away. (There is a very similar little figure among the lines of hunters in **Fig.8.5**).

The unique set of images in **Fig.8.35** is entirely enigmatic. The five almost identical objects, painted in isolation, appear to represent people without arms but whose heads and single legs seem reasonably well-formed and clear, slumped forward, raised from the ground and attached at the midriff to a plant-form with a slightly tufted top and wide base. Even if this is correct, the significance of the imagery still eludes us. The same is almost as true of another completely isolated image: **Fig.8.36.** A figure shown, unusually, entirely in side view,which emphasises a swollen belly that seems to indicate that she is pregnant, reaches up to touch five straight parallel lines. Forms resembling

leaves or plants are placed on each side of her. Perhaps she is gathering plants or firewood but she is alone and has no bag. But her significance is elusive. Through comparative studies of paintings illustrating the main themes of the art, we may be able to go a long way towards understanding but still some images will remain to puzzle and tantalise. By their very rarity, these small scenes emphasise how the multiplicity of very ordinary human actions that go unnoticed and unremarked in life are also virtually absent from the paintings

The distinction between the larger, more detailed and accomplished works of skilled artists, in which the canon is particularly restricted and the small sketches of minor artists usually located away from large panels of paintings should probably be pointed out once more. The latter have a much greater variety. They are the ones that depict scenes of hunting small animals, preparing plant food, picking fruit, conversation, copulation and buggery. Many seem anecdotal and to carry considerably less visual weight, import or significance and none of the resonances or connotations or definitive intentions of the main corpus. This distinction may overlap in part with the one made by Frobenius in separating 'symbolic art' from the rest and by Breuil in separating 'academic' from 'human' paintings. It is now clear that the main paintings were very little concerned with illustrating events: they are not narrative and it is impossible to extract a story from any but the most trivial and anecdotal sketches.

Conclusion

A few other commentators on the paintings have recognized that there is for us something strange and problematic in what most artists chose to depict. A recent analysis of Pager's Brandberg copies comments: the "art mostly shows people carrying out activities of their daily life. This large share of unspecialized activity makes it seem as though the painters wanted to place a emphasis on normality." "Answers have to be found for the question,as to why the overwhelming mass of depictions does not, even superficially,

give the impression of dealing with something other than sheer ordinariness."[15] In contrast and long before this was written, Vinnicombe recognized that the paintings in some way generalised about society. "They are not a realistic reflection of the daily pursuits or environment of the Bushman... subjects which were commonplace but essential components of the lives of the Bushmen are excluded... The artists were not imitating nature, but were selecting patterns or basic formulae from nature which they repeated time after time."[16] "Bows and arrows... are shown more frequently as a technological adjunct rather than a weapon of the chase... Digging sticks... are represented more as an abstract symbol of food-gathering than as a practical instrument for digging."[17] Her insights can now be explored further: their implications sought and reasons and explanations for them suggested.

The sense of distance and detachment, the lack of personal engagement by the artist, the abstraction of essentials from incidentals can now be defined more clearly, precisely, concretely and comprehensively, explored more widely and set in ideological and social contexts. As depicted in the paintings, the human figure seems ageless and stands outside time. Images of people are not concerned with particularities, specifics or the accidents of time or place. They are not concerned with individuals, with personality or idiosyncracy. There is no description or exploration or celebration of the human form as individual, personal, beautiful, emotional, loving, sexual or erotic, little hint of psychological penetration. All adults are shown in the prime of life and children are generally shown as miniature adults in their bodily proportions. There are no paintings of babies, save as heads appearing from the bags in which their mothers carry them: they are an extension of the mother, emblems of motherhood rather than humans in their own right. There are no paintings of wounds, deformities, weakness, sickness or the ravages of age. The human is an <u>ephebe</u>; the images are icons, not only in the broad sense of the term as representational images but also partly in the

sense used for the imagery of the eastern Christian churches. They share the same timeless quality, free from all topicality and ephemeral distractions, the same economy of detail, the same indeterminate setting and generalised character. The human image became a conventionalised and generalised form. In the same way, the bow, bag, whisk or stick are shown so regularly with particular people in particular roles that they become emblems which define these roles.

The human image was conceived of as an archetype, celebrating the fundamental unchanging essence of the human condition, the purpose of man, his responsibilities, his potential and power as perceived by the artists' society. Men and women were portrayed in their separate roles as providers, hunters and gatherers, in their roles as parents and members of a family, a group and a society. The images were pictorial realizations of the roles of men and women in society, fulfilling their established roles in production and reproduction. Through images of the human figure, the art explored the social and moral order. The paintings were embodiments of ideology, of ideological perceptions of society, direct visualizations of human significance as the artists understood it. They were assertions about the nature of society. The art achieved this in simple and general terms, without submerging the themes in a wealth of particularities and specifics, the multiplicity of possible manifestations of the central concepts. The paintings are, in large part, a highly conventionalised visual system in which sets of simple attributes denote a limited range of archetypes, but artists were always able to elaborate these into a more complex and detailed imagery. The designation of the archetype of the hunter, gatherer, parent, family or community could be much more than a delineation of attributes. They became complete and complex, vivid and vital aesthetic compositions.

As a conclusion to this examination of life as it is recorded in the paintings, we should note that nowhere is there a painting that illustrates the craft of painting

itself, none that depicts an artist, his equipment or ways of working. This is, in itself, a powerful argument against those interpretations of the art that claim that paintings were created primarily for the pleasure they gave to the artist or to commemorate pleasures experienced personally by the artists. One of any painter's greatest pleasures, particularly if one takes this line of interpretation, is the act of painting itself: this is inherent in the thesis, yet this key activity went entirely unrecorded. Although it is justifiably difficult to accept that painting was considered too insignificant an activity in society to be celebrated in paint, it seems it was not a defining feature of anyone's role in society. Painting was not a distinct, acknowledged, primary role and the art is primarily concerned with establishing and exploring roles. The only roles that mattered were those of the hunter, gatherer, father and mother and, as we shall see in subsequent chapters, dancer, trancer, healer, spirit and source of potency: that of artist was subsumed in these greater social roles. No one was perceived as exclusively, primarily or even importantly as an artist and no artist was conceived of as a specialist in his craft. The artists' contributions to their society were not believed to be distinct from or as significant as those derived from their other roles.

It seems that none of the paintings in this chapter show any apparent concern with metaphysical aspects of life. They seem to focus on the most basic elements of economic and social life, with hunting, gathering, raising a family and cooperation within the community. However, the many minor attributes or motifs attached to the participants which we have so far barely mentioned - they were noted in **Figs.8.5** and 8 **.15** - may introduce references to the metaphysical and form a sustained commentary on the main themes. This is discussed in Chapter 14.

This analysis of the most basic imagery makes clear that many paintings of men, women and their families contain a great many close and convincing parallels to Kung, and probably all San hunter-gatherer life. The absence of

clothes among hunters; the bow, arrows and narrow hunting bags containing more arrows and whisks and slung over one shoulder; quivers; the clubs and missiles used against small animals; the long flexible sticks used to entangle and extract animals from their burrows; even the telling detail apparently showing the exchange of arrows by hunters during a hunt, are all in close correspondence with Kung hunting practice. The aprons, carrying capes, digging sticks and large bags match the dress and equipment of Kung women.[18] The community as a small number of small nuclear families matches Kung social organisation.[19] There are notable differences in the sizes of bows and the construction of the arrows and in the absence of any indications of the nets used as carriers and the ostrich eggs used as water containers by Kung women. The similarities are sufficiently close to give confidence that Kung material can be used to suggest interpretations of a great deal more of the imagery. The exceptions point to caution: correspondences will not be comprehensive or exact.

Kung, and all other known San communities, divided productive tasks by sex; and hunting and gathering are envisaged as the two fundamental and entirely distinct categories in the art. A Kung man's most important role was as a hunter. Marshall, Lee and others have described the attention that Kung foragers still paid to hunting, even though most of their associates in the Dobe settlements had long abandoned it as a mode of livelihood. The way it dominated men's thoughts and conversations was disproportionate to the time spent in hunting or in the subsidiary activities associated with it or to the economic contribution that hunting made to the community. The social significance of hunting was much greater than any strictly economic benefit it brought.

Kung women's primary productive role was collecting food: fruit, plants and tubers, grubs and insects, rodents and small reptiles, eggs and nestlings. The food that a Kung woman gathered belonged to her individually and she prepared and cooked it for her immediate family. Unlike meat, it was

not shared amongst the other members of the camp. Collected food had none of the significance of meat in cementing social bonds.[20]

It is precisely such life, social relationships and ideology that are represented in the paintings, not only in details but in the broad sweep of perceptions of significance.

NOTES

1. Dornan, 1917: 43.

2. In the descriptions and analysis in this chapter, I omit discussion of this and other attributes attached to hunters: the various groupings and types of lines on the head or penis or the unidentifiable shapes and lines, particularly 'leaf-shapes' attached to the chest or held in the hand. These are the subject of Chapter 14.

3. This omits the two smaller figures added at the very top, which will be discussed in Chapter 9.

4. Goodall, 1959: 15, calls this a "rare and therefore precious...hunting scene... where the huntsman is actually confronted with his quarry", suggesting they are both hunting the small buck between them. This is nonsense for it is one of a line of similar animals painted by another artist, and before the hunters.

5. About 1964, I re-invented such an image as the emblem of the Historical Monuments Commission of Southern Rhodesia and of National Monuments; it still survives as such for Zimbabwe. Its details reveal how little I understood the principles of the art.

6. One holds a leaf-shaped object, classed as an emblem in Chapter 14 and discussed there.

7. Silberbauer, 1965: 54; Marshall, 1976a: 145-6; Lee, 1979: 129.

8. It is one of the many minor regularities of the paintings that demonstrate how attributes like whisks were used to define their subjects that the whisks of hunters are never shown outside their hunting bags. Exceptions appear to be those carried by some of the hunters in **Fig.8.5**, others hunting elephants in **Fig.12.4 below** and men in **Figs.9.15, 9.32 and 9.34 below,** but in later chapters it will be shown that none of these groups is involved in hunting but in aspects of dancing or trancing. In South Africa bags and whisks have been taken as universal indicators of trancing because paintings of whisks and bags are sometimes - the frequency has not been mentioned - superimposed on paintings

of eland, the great metaphor for trance in the Drakensberg: Lewis-Williams, 1987c: 172, 174. This is clearly not the case in Zimbabwe: the whisk in the bag is an attribute of the hunter; those held in the hand signify dancers.

9. Silberbauer, 1965: 88; Lee, 1979: 137-7.

10. Goodall, 1959: Fig.5, illustrates another figure crawling on his stomach and thrusting a long stick ahead of him towards two small unidentifiable animals that are also possibly hyrax. He is clearly in a burrow even though this is not directly delineated.

11. The few other exceptions, groups of hunters killing very large and dangerous animals, especially elephant, rhino and buffalo, are the subject of Chapter 12.

12. Marshall, 1976a: 296-7.

13. Lee, 1979: 139-41.

14. Marshall, 1976a: 100-2; Lee, 1984: 124.

15. Lenssen-Erz in Pager, 1989: 349, 369.

16. Vinnicombe, 1976: 347.

17. Vinnicombe, 1976: 347.

18. Lee, 1979: 123-8.

19. Marshall, 1976a: 168-75.

20. Marshall, 1976a: 96-8.

9. DANCING AND TRANCE DANCING

There are now many descriptions of San dancing.[1] Kung trance dancing has been particularly comprehensively studied.[2] All San societies appear to have shared very similar dance practices. As hunting and gathering were the bases of the economy and economic relations in many San societies, and as the product of hunting, meat, was a prime means of mediating group and kinship ties and obligations, so trance dancing was a primary means of expressing relationships within the community and particularly its unity and solidarity.[3] Dance was prayer, catharsis, exercise, entertainment and education; the dance floor was school, theatre, circus, clinic and church in one.[4] Dancing was the most obvious manifestation of what has been called "symbolic work".[5]

Communal trance dancing was the means by which trance was induced and trancers were the means used by the community to diminish or heal tensions and stresses within itself, reestablish and reinforce communal bonds, bonds with the spirit world, with nature and animals, and with the wider network of dispersed bands. Trancing was also the means of influencing spirits, climate and rain, movements of herds, and the course of disease. The trance dance was, for all known San societies, the communal enactment of their beliefs, the means of activating and harnessing spiritual energy, of relieving the tensions within their communities, of connecting people with the world of the gods and spirits and enabling them to enter and influence it.[6]

Kung trance dances are frequent, prolonged, and emotionally and physically intense experiences. They are particularly frequent at periods of internal conflict, stress or intense social interaction, for instance when the members of several different camps congregate.[7] They are initiated by individuals and are responsive to the mood of the camp and community. They take place in the cool of the night whenever the opportunity and occasion offer, whenever there are enough people gathered in one place, and when the 'atmosphere seems

right', often every two or three nights, and last through the night. Every member of the community plays a role in and benefits from the dances. They demand a great deal of time, effort and energy of all the participants. Women gather the wood for the dance fire, lit in the open space at the centre of the camp, and they lay and tend it. They squat together close to the fire and clap and sing through the performance in unison to provide the chorus and rhythm of the dance, extremely aware and sensitive to every mood of the dance and matching the intensity of their performance to that of the dancers.[8]

No particular dress or accoutrements are considered essential but many of the dancers paint their bodies or wear beads or long dance aprons hanging over their buttocks and down to their knees. Many also strap sets of small rattles to their calves or biceps - their only form of musical instrument. Some like to carry animal tails - objects only used in dancing - or their walking or digging sticks, which they use as supports or to accent their steps. There is one mention of one dancer once wearing a skin cap.[9]

The dancers, predominantly men but with women and children often joining in, form a line, close together and often touching, holding and supporting one another. They dance in a circle, their feet making a furrow in the sand. "The movements are usually small and controlled, the posture slightly bent at the knees, either erect or leaning over from the waist. The feet are only lifted up several inches, then stomped firmly and sharply into the ground... steps may carry a dancer only several inches forward... [A dancer may] bend sharply at the waist, his chest nearly parallel to the ground... As the dancers work towards [trance] their steps become stronger. Their feet pound the ground like pile drivers... It is with [trance] that the dancing may become less controlled, and sometimes wild."[10] The same author also describes how another dancer "moves in place, with light strong rhythmic steps. Hovering over the ground, hands up in the air, elbows bent at ninety degrees, accenting the beat, he is like a giant water bird readying for landing."[11]

There is room for considerable individual variation in the dance: some dancers clown around in the early stages of the evening, others become violent and unrestrained as they feel the onset of trance. Trance itself makes many dancers sway, stagger, stumble and fall.[12]

Trance dances change over time. Among the Kung, recent recorded developments have included the Drum Dance in which the main instrument, the drum, as well as elements of the dance itself show evidence of recent derivation from Bantu-speaking neighbours. It is a dance in which only women participate and for them it is a preparation for and transition towards the main communal trance dances. A man does the drumming and men watch the performances. Another recent introduction was the Trees Dance, which shows much stronger foreign influences, and is highly structured, disciplined and choreographed by its star performer and soloist.[13]

Dancing in the paintings

Given the importance of dancing to the San, one would expect many paintings to represent it, yet in Zimbabwe Goodall interpreted only one of her copies of paintings as a dance[14] and Cooke never mentioned dancing at all in any of his many studies of the art. This was in part a consequence of their general failure to relate the paintings to San beliefs or practices but also implies that dance was of negligible importance in the art of Zimbabwe. This has now been stated explicitly: a student of Lewis-Williams, and hence well aware of the importance he places on trance dancing in San society and art, has recently taken the apparent absence of any "convincing" depictions of dancing in Zimbabwe to suggest that trance was induced there not by dancing but by the use of drugs.[15] One can only conclude that the paintings ignore one of the most important aspects of San life or that dancing was indeed unimportant in Zimbabwe or, as I believe, that researchers have all failed to recognise references to dancing in the art.

Their difficulties may well stem from failing to understand the artistic system. As I argue throughout this

work, the art deals in some way with the whole of life but seldom does this through direct, specific, realistic, narrative illustration. The paintings explore life by depicting archetypes, using selected attributes to establish and define these. Just as there are very few hunting scenes but a great many paintings of hunters, recognizable by their attributes of bows, arrows and hunting bags, so there may be very few obvious or easily recognizable dance scenes but many paintings of dancers, recognizable in the same way: by their postures, gestures, clothing, adornments, accessories and instruments.[16] Locations, such as a camp, established by setting people's equipment around them, and numbers of participants may also have helped to make the implications of the imagery clearer.

Most dancing involves concerted, repetitive, stylised and rhythmic actions by a group of people moving in unison in response to a common rhythm. But these also seem to be present in many friezes of what seem to be hunters and gatherers. However, dance postures and gestures are also likely to appear more specific than those of hunters or gatherers, further removed from everyday life, more stylised, stranger, more emphatic and more exaggerated. Dancers will also be distinguishable from hunters and gatherers by their lack of weapons and other appropriate equipment and the presence of specific dance accessories. Dress and adornment are likely to be more elaborate. Because this is so, there is undoubtedly a temptation to interpret all peculiar body positions, inexplicable behaviour, objects that we cannot identify or complex groups where we cannot understand as attributes of dancing.

Postures and gestures

The basic Kung dancing posture is shown in **Fig.9.1**: a standing figure, both feet together with a slight forward inclination of the body, pushing the chest out and the buttocks back, giving a graceful curve to the back and emphasis to the buttocks. In **Fig.9.2**, figures with the same composed posture hold their arms straight down - a gesture denoting dance in the Drakensberg[17] but rarely seen in

Zimbabwe - and at least one begins to lift one leg. In **Fig.9.3**, painted on a cave roof and so with no vertical orientation, the participants bend one leg and raise the other; both arms are raised and bent, one in front of the body and the other behind, arrested in a stomping action of the feet and a pumping or rotation of the arms. This compact group of eleven women, five men and three children also gives a strong sense of close-knit bodies and of the force and compulsion of emphatic, unified, rhythmic gestures characteristic of dance. The sexes are largely grouped separately, women on the left and men on the right, and further distinguished by colour - the men are painted in red and the women in ochre: though there are three women among the men and the same colour as them. Three smaller figures, seemingly children, are interspersed with the women. In **Fig.9.4** two figures using the same actions are almost horizontal.[18]

A gesture occasionally adopted by Kung dancers and also attributed to dancers in the Drakensberg paintings, appears to be common in the Zimbabwe paintings: both arms are raised, spread wide and bent at the elbows: **Fig.9.5.**[19] Here one foot is carefully raised and the body kept stiffly erect in a posture quite unlike the firm march or urgent run of the hunter. Most have both legs straight, both feet firmly planted on the ground and the body is straight and erect: their stance usually seems calm and ordered, movement slow and measured and the gesture carefully controlled and precise (see **Fig.7.9 above**). On the other hand this gesture is sometimes also made by dancers engaged in the most violent movement: **Fig.9.7.**

Kung dancing can also be "less controlled and sometimes wild".[20] Some paintings seem to express a release of physical energy and emotional restraints that twist and contort the whole body into impossible positions. The two pairs of figures in **Fig.9.6** bend and sway dangerously towards and away from their partners. This is taken to extremes in the pair of figures in **Fig.9.7**, both with their backs twisted into impossible curves. These postures and gestures are

combined in one of the very few almost entirely straightforward illustrations of dances, painted on a clear surface, all at one time and with very few subsequent additions: **Fig.9.8.**[21] In a great throng of people, four men, painted larger than the rest on the far left, crouch, raise their legs, swing their arms wide and fall forwards, in frenzied abandon. In contrast, at the top right, eleven much more controlled women raise their legs, hold hands with each other and swing their arms; one bends forward in an almost crouched position and raises both arms. Below the men are at least seven seated figures with arms raised, hands together and fingers outstretched. Although neither aprons nor breasts are shown, the curves of their bodies suggest that they are women and their clapping that they form a dance chorus.

They sit close to a formless blob which may represent a dance fire. Round this sit another ten figures, probably men. At least ten men stand around the edges of this group. Moving right, there are ten more seated figures, probably women, facing right, away from the fire and towards 18 standing men. The whole scene can thus be separated into distinct groups: the male and female dancers, the chorus, those seated round the fire and those seated and standing to the right. There is a remarkable absence of any weapons, bags, clothing or equipment and there are no distinguishable family groupings. These unusual qualities are heightened and emphasised by two small scenes by the same artist painted a short distance away from the main panel on the same rock surface (**Figs.9.9 and 9.10**). The first is of a small group of hunters with their weapons and the other of families in camp with their belongings around them. The contrasts between the three scenes support my arguments that all paintings were conceived within a structure of archetypes, in these instances of hunters, families and, in the main panel, whole communities.

Much suggests that the main scene illustrates a gathering of several different bands: Kung society was structured to allow for such periodic gatherings. They were

occasions for particularly frequent trance dancing.[22] At the same time, band ties were loosened and people were able to change bands. In this painting, distinctions between the bands may have been deliberately eliminated through the omission of any indication of the personal possessions which may define groups in the art. The scene thus also becomes a celebration of inter-communal unity in its broadest sense.

Fig.9.11 includes at least 21 men, in at least three separate groups by several different artists. Only six have weapons. All move in unison, in the same direction round a rough circle, heads often looking down and arms waving above their heads or reaching forward. The unity of movement, the way the figures lean forward and their dramatic gestures suggest that they are dancers. The groups were subsequently united by a line running through them, which perhaps represents the furrow made in the dance floor by the passage of dancers. (Some figures seem to hold the line but this is false for the line is superimposed on them. They are clearly putting no effort into grasping, lifting or pulling at it nor does their connection with it interrupt the speed or lightness of their progress.) At the bottom the line passes through another quite separate group of figures by yet another hand: four aproned women, of whom three have their arms raised in the dance gesture. A small sketch of two more has been added beside and in imitation of them.

The figures of **Fig.9.12** convey very much the feel of the same movements. They are all men without hunting equipment: four lean forward and take wide steps in unison suggesting fluid and concerted speed. Those above them spread their arms wide and occasionally raise both above their heads or begin to crouch, sway or stumble.

Fig.9.13 shows a compact group of 15 men: crouching, swaying and falling backwards, their arms outstretched and raised. Some have one leg raised, in one instance so high it almost touches the chest. This is a single concentrated group but each participant gives individual expression to his reactions to the energy of the dance. These figures, naked and without any equipment, are surrounded by the bows and

arrows of hunters and by at least five hunters themselves. Later artists have added four men at the top and one has given his personal gloss to the expression of the energy of the dance in a figure - bottom right - leaning forward with one leg bent double: an epitome of concentrated physical force.

The figures in **Fig.8.9 above**, almost all without any equipment, save for one hunter and two men probing an animal burrow, also bend forward, crouch, sway, spread their arms wide or raise one arm and bend the other backwards. Though few of these postures are, by themselves, unambiguous indicators of dancing, the groups as a whole convey nothing other than the varying steps and effects of dancing.

Apparel

Men and particularly women are often shown with tassels round their knees, elbows, calves, biceps or chests. For women these are not specifically dance wear for they can be seen in the gatherers in **Fig. 8.11 above**, the mothers in **Fig.8.18 above** and the women fighting in **Fig.8.26 above**. They do seem however to occur more frequently on dancers. Three of the women dancers in **Fig.9.8** wear tassels round their calves. Two of the women in dance postures in **Fig.9.14** have pairs of long white tassels with wide serrated ends attached to their knees. The two women in **Fig.9.23** - one has her arms raised in what is now a recognizable dance gesture and the other has her arms in an equally stylised position - both have tassels over their chests and one tassels on one arm. In **Fig.9.34** six men, whom we shall be showing are dancers, all have large tassels on their upper arms.

A defining attribute of women, the apron, is also frequently emphasised in paintings of women dancers e.g. in **Figs.9.3, 9.11 bottom, 9.14 and 9.23.** The women's dance in **Fig.9.8** takes place away from the main assemblage of people. All the participants possess tasselled aprons (front and back. Five of them have taken theirs off and one waves hers and so probably do another two. The others lie discarded, two of them beside their owners' digging sticks. The women in **Fig.9.4** have shapes with four long thin tassels beside them

which represent their discarded rear aprons as well as elongated oval shapes which are probably their front aprons. Kung and Gwi men consider the buttocks the most erotic part of the female body and an apron to cover them was the single essential item of female clothing.[23] Dances where the apron is shown deliberately discarded are thus likely to have been exclusively female dances, and may also have had some erotic or sexual content. Kung women certainly had their own forms of dancing and trance dancing from which men were excluded. In the Gwi Eland Dance and Kung Eland Bull Dance, both performed by women to celebrate a girl's first menstruation and from which men are excluded, the removal of aprons is an essential element.[24]

Men are sometimes shown with tufts protruding from the base of the spine, slightly reminiscent of the plumage of a bird's tail, or with two long tails, easily distinguished from women's aprons, hanging down over their buttocks. In **Fig.9.15** a line of 29 men (ten of whom are significantly smaller than the rest, though clearly copies of them, and may have been added by a later artist) walks away from a camp, denoted by bags suspended from bent withies with hunting bags and bows laid beside them and even a severed warthog's head impaled on one of the withies. There is nothing in their movements to suggest dancing. All have left their bows and bags behind, so they are not going hunting. Most have two long tails hanging down behind and nine also have tufts at the base of their backs. As we shall see, such tails seem to correlate closely only with what are interpreted as other dance attributes and are perhaps the least ambiguous, indicators of dance in the paintings. They can also be seen as analogous to the aprons worn only for dances by Kung men or to the tails that Kung men carry only when they are dancing.[25]

Adornment

Multiple white lines or lines of white dots on wrists, ankles, neck or waist, representing strings of beads, may have been used to denote dancing. The Kung wear such strings of beads "to make themselves look strong and attractive to

the spirits with whom they communicate in the spirit world"[26] and it is of the essence of the trance dance that participants should do this. Lines of white dots are painted across the limbs, waists and buttocks of the couples in **Fig.9.6.** But similar lines are also painted, for example, across the hunters in **Fig.13.1 below** and there is nothing else about them to suggest an association with dance.

Fig.9.14 (a detail of **Fig.15.17 below**) is of four men and four women who all bend forward and raise their arms in characteristic dance positions. This scene seems to represent four married couples and their children: the two central men are matched with two of the women and adopt the same postures; one of these pairs has a child between them and decorated like them and the woman at the top of the composition has a similar child. We have established how white paint was used to connote the supernatural and this scene is intensified by a prolific use of white: the figures are outlined in white dots and similar dots and lines cover most of their bodies and equipment. These dots clearly cannot denote beads or body paint: their significance is considered in Chapter 15. The women have white lines on their wrists which probably do denote strings of beads, three or more long white stripes like feathers on their heads, narrow white aprons over their buttocks and thongs ending in many long thin tassels tied to their knees.

The men have white lines curving down on both sides of the head and almost covering it. Of the two who stand on the sides of the group, the one on the left has released a white arrow with a large triangular head and a forked tripartite flight. He is covered in white lines. The other (see **Fig.15.17 below**) has his bow, arrows and hunting bag, holding more arrows and heavily decorated with white dots and dashes beside him.

Three of the women, and originally probably all four, have white fingers and toes, strange additions that may represent claws. Three flows of white flecks may emanate from the central man: one certainly emerges from his right armpit but another may come from the hands of his partner and

the other from the woman above him. Five of the eight figures - the two peripheral hunters, the central man and two women - have their feet twisted backwards, a deliberate and entirely unnatural deformity.

The two contorted figures in **Fig.9.7** and many of the swaying men in **Fig.9.12** have white lines across or down their bodies. One of the men in **Fig.9.11** has an intricate grid of white lines surviving over part of him. White body paint is used in part in a more naturalistic way in **Pls.9.1 and 9.2.** Though a great deal of the large panel of paintings of which these are a part has been almost obliterated by rain wash, a portion is exceptionally well preserved and retains a great deal of superimposed detail in white. At the core of the panel, 17 white-ornamented figures remain from a single late composition by one artist. Eight are in a single file and the others in looser groupings above and below them. They all seem to be walking upright and normally. However they lack any hunting bags or equipment, suggesting that they may be intended to represent dancers. This may be made more explicit in two figures towards the top and left who hold their arms rigid and straight down in front of their bodies. Almost all the figures have white paint on the insides of their arms and legs, down their chests and stomachs, as lines of dots across the penis, often circling the eyes and as stripes down the manes behind their heads and, in one case, as stripes down the face. The eye surrounds, face stripes and light coloration of the underside of the body and inside of the limbs reproduce the markings of sable antelope. This seems a clear demonstration that dancers sometimes painted their bodies not simply as decoration but to identify themselves with particular animal species. The figures are set in a camp - as the variety of bags, gourds, hides and bows and arrows establishes. They are also divided up and partly enclosed by multiple, usually triple, lines also outlined and striped in white. Such lines are unusual. When they occur they usually represent shelters or windbreaks in a camp. Here they may represent the ruts beaten out by the lines of dancers.

Dance accessories

The only musical instruments used in traditional Gwi or Kung dancing are sets of small rattles sewn to leather bands strapped round legs, ankles or arms.[27] In **Fig.9.16** two small stocky figures have been added at the top of a group of 13 tall hunters. Both are naked and unarmed and walk normally though they both have one arm raised. Dots on the biceps of both arms of both figures are the only possible representations of such rattles known in Zimbabwe. There is little else in this composition to suggest that the hunters have anything to do with dancing. Many have hunting bags slung from a shoulder and carry weapons while others have their hunting equipment laid beside them. They are all standing or walking calmly and upright in various directions. Two raise their arms in a possible dance gesture and some may lean forward slightly. It seems likely that the two figures with rattles were added to the composition to clarify and establish or even alter the connotation of the earlier painting of the hunters and bring them into the realm of dancing: a good example of how content could be elucidated, modified or changed by the addition of new motifs.

Three distinctive motifs - which I describe as 'discs', 'leaves' and 'combs'- can be held in the hand or attached to the arms or shoulders. They have never been recognized or discussed before. **Fig.9.17** shows a man holding a comb in each hand and with discs hanging from his elbows. The hunter lowest left in **Fig.9.16** holds a leaf-shape. In its most elaborate form, the comb is double-sided with a short straight handle and a series of lines sticking straight out from it: the shape formed by the teeth can be triangular or oval. Combs are carried by a man at the bottom of **Fig.9.18** and by two thin and elongated men in **Fig.9.19.**

These three motifs are all treated in the same ways and often appear on the same figures.[28] Because they are often held in the hand and because the straps that attach them to the shoulder are often shown, it seems probable that they represent actual objects. Because they are all treated in the same way, they probably all belong to a single class of

object. The discs are strongly reminiscent of rattles described in the eastern Cape in a somewhat dubious nineteenth-century ethnography as "Bushman bells": "The larger kind are formed of a piece of dry hide from which the hair has been scraped. They were in the shape of a large hollow sphere, and were fastened to the upper arm or shoulder."[29] Otherwise these three motifs bear little obvious resemblance to anything that any San are known to have used nor are they restricted to figures that are otherwise identifiable as dancers. The suggestion that they may be dance rattles rests on the single dubious analogy drawn above. It is plausible but by no means certain. They are discussed more fully as emblems in Chapter 14.

Another distinctive and problematic object is shown in **Figs.9.20-25** and perhaps with a recumbent figure in **Fig.9.34** - long, thin and rectangular, and clearly rigid, light and easily manipulated. These objects are not simply sticks: not only are they thicker than the usual stick and frequently slightly thickened or splayed at both ends, but they are almost always held slightly in front of the face.[30] The best interpretation seems to be that they were a hollow pipe that was sucked or blown. They may have been used as a megaphone to amplify and resonate human sounds or produce musical notes. Unlike the comb, disc or leaf, which are shown on men and women and isolated individuals, pipes are generally manipulated by several people together, almost all of them men. Pipers never appear in dance scenes or unambiguously associated with dancers and those who hold them seldom have any firm attributes to suggest that they were dancers. The best associations are the pipers of **Fig.9.20,** who are superimposed on a little group of four women dancing: three of these pipers have extraordinary zig-zag shapes to their free arms that can have no parallel in reality; pipers in **Fig.9.23** are juxtaposed with two women in a different pigment - white - and by another artist, who appear to be dancing; while many of the figures holding pipes in **Fig.9.24** have tassels on their legs, tufts at the base of the spine and the sway-backed, inclined and crouched postures that have

all been taken as indicators of dance. In **Fig.9.25** a figure with long stick-like limbs and body and a tuft attached to the small of his back, sits and holds a long pipe with a bulbous end to his face: one of the most compelling of all paintings of this subject.[31]

Kung dancers balance themselves with a stick or sometimes a pair of sticks.[32] In South Africa sticks, particularly pairs of short sticks used by crouched figures as supports, have been identified as dance accessories.[33] In Zimbabwe, such paintings are extremely rare: **Fig.9.26** is the only example known to me. The heavy, square faces and gaping jaws of the three grouped figures are so far outside the usual modes of representing the human head that they suggest masks: the lines from the top of their heads may then be imitation horns; the fourth clearly wears a kudu's head and horns with the skin forming a cape on his shoulders. I know of only two other seemingly unambiguous paintings of people wearing the heads of animals or masks (**Figs.9.27 and 9.28**): neither has any weapons and so cannot be a hunter or in hunting camouflage; but neither has any companions or accoutrements to confirm them as dancers.

Many dancers carry single short sticks. The faint line across the hand of the young dancer in **Fig.9.1** may represent a stick; three or four of the men in **Fig.9.12** and three of the men added to **Fig.9.13** hold them and so does a figure in **Fig.9.18**. **Fig.9.29**, a scene damaged by slight but pervasive overall exfoliation, shows eighteen women in a line, walking away from a camp. At first glance, they seem to represent a quite ordinary party of gatherers. Almost all carry single sticks upright in front of them: but these are too short to be digging sticks and correspond more closely to the sticks used in dancing. The party is also much too large for a normal foraging party but an acceptable number for participants in a communal dance. All wear pairs of aprons, the front one very long. Other attributes make their identification as dancers more certain: most have leaf shapes - a most unusual attribute for a woman - attached to one arm, usually the arm behind the body and not carrying the stick.

Most also have shapes, perhaps combs, attached to the angles of neck and shoulders on both sides of the neck. These indicators, slight in our eyes but cumulative, seem to show how artists used a series of different attributes to remove a scene like this from the everyday activity of gathering food and locate it in the realm of dancing.

Fig.9.30 shows a line of 12 men, each with two tails hanging over his buttocks and raising a long stick vertically above his head: in length these are much more like a woman's digging stick than a dance stick. The leading and third figures have hunting bags containing arrows though this is certainly not a hunting party for none of them has a bow. Three have horizontal shapes with pairs of tassels both front and rear slung round their necks: what seem to be gatherers' bags and never otherwise associated with men. Four have discs suspended from their elbows; one has long pointed ears rising from his crown. In this composition, men thus have attributes both of dancers - the tails and discs - and women - the long sticks held vertically and the large bags slung low on the back. A subsequent painter has added seven women to the end of the line, with their arms raised in a dance gesture.

Another accessory used in dancing by the Kung, and associated exclusively with dancing in paintings in South Africa and hence taken as a diagnostic indicator of dance there, is the fly whisk.[34] In Zimbabwe, the fly whisk, with a short straight handle and thick bushy end, was primarily a means of identifying the archetype of the hunter: one is almost always shown protruding from a hunter's bag (e.g.the bag of the figure superimposed - second from the left - on the dancers of **Fig.9.5**). It was very seldom if ever shown in a hunter's hands. Dancers may wave whisks much more often: twelve of the men in **Fig.9.15** carry whisks of different shapes and sizes, some very large, in both hands. Four of the six men in **Fig.9.34** wave whisks; two of them also wave their hunting bags, one with a whisk still in it. The figure third from the back in **Fig.9.30** may have one attached to the end of his stick. In **Fig.15.21 below**, one of a pair of

figures, top left, waves whisks in both hands. A woman with a particularly large pair of aprons who seems to be dancing alone in the bottom right corner of this panel also waves a pair of whisks: the only known example of a woman with whisks. The whisk was also attached to the shoulder in exactly the same ways as the comb, leaf or disc (e.g. the figure second from the left in **Fig.9.11**; the figure in **Fig.9.17**; a piper in **Fig.9.24**; and four of the line of figures in **Fig.14.9 below**).

An instrument represented by a line curved or angled in the middle and looking like a flail, with a long, thin, flexible whip-like end rather than the large tuft of a fly whisk, is a more frequent element of Zimbabwean dance scenes. In **Fig.9.31** four men whose identical postures suggest they are dancers carry them upright close to their chests. The figure in the centre of **Fig.9.18** holds one and all the male dancers in **Fig.9.8** also hold them or have them attached to their arms. These could well correspond to the animal tails that some Kung men carry while they dance.[35]

Several of the figures already illustrated carry arrows with a large forked or open transverse triangular head and, often, a large barb at the base of the head. These have already been noticed in Chapter 8 and will be more fully discussed in Chapter 12 and interpreted as representations of the small, invisible magical arrows of potency that are shot into the bodies of novice trancers by their teachers to activate their potency.[36] The man on the left of **Fig.9.14** aims one from his bow; and four of the large and one of the small figures in **Fig.9.15** carry them, though they have no bows with them; a strong indication that at least in this particular situation these do not represent ordinary weapons.

Participants in some dances carry an extraordinary array of objects: to an extent that the groups seem to be constructed around and focus on these objects and their diversity. The line of nine men shown in such detail in **Fig.9.32** form a single group acting in unison. They are certainly not a hunting party: only one has a hunting bag and two bows and arrows. Two or three adopt postures suggestive

of dancing, with raised arms, raised leg or arms held rigid. Each participant holds different carefully detailed objects: two hold what we have called 'flails' or tails; two, probably originally four, a fly whisk or whisks; and three 'arrows of potency'. (The same artist painted two much more straightforward hunters, **Fig.7.14 above**, a short distance to the right of this line of figures and they both hold 'arrows of potency'.) Others have flails, leaf shapes and discs attached to their arms. Two smaller figures added amongst them have short sticks.

Fig.9.33 illustrates the same point: the postures of the 17 original figures, moving in unison, leaning forward, with legs bent and raised, establish that they are dancing. All have narrow tailed capes tied round their necks and falling down their backs or, in one instance, held in one hand; several have tails falling over their buttocks. Their sex is uncertain: some have suggestions of a penis while the cape is generally a female attribute, but so are the digging stick and large bag and in **Fig.9.30** we have seen these adopted by male dancers. All have single, thick, curved 'plumes' attached to their strangely flattened heads. Every figure holds a large disc in one hand, most of them close to the body, and an object in the other. These are all different and very precisely painted though none is readily or unambiguously identifiable: most suggest leaf shapes, bundles of arrows, twigs, brushes, branches or short sticks.[37]

Conclusions

A few paintings, most obviously **Fig.9.8**, are so straightforward, clear and direct and so easily correlated with many known Kung dance practices - in their occasion, location, postures, accessories, even the chorus of clapping women - that there can be little doubt about what they illustrate. They are rare, like all illustrative scenes in the art. We have to transfer our attention instead to trying to identify motifs that may denote dance. Throughout this chapter, I have taken recurrent graphic motifs and tried to identify what they represent. I have interpreted simple straight lines variously as digging sticks, dance sticks and

pipes, depending on their length, shape and how they are handled: digging sticks are long, dance sticks short and pipes held to the face and often thickened slightly at the ends. Lines bent or angled in the middle have been called 'flails'. These motifs become recognizable as dance attributes when they are used by men without the accoutrements of hunters, moving in a concerted way, wearing tails or with other items that are more clearly identifiable as dance accoutrements, like whisks or arrows of potency. Other recurrent shapes, held or fixed to the shoulders or arms, have been called leaf, comb or disc shapes. Their associations with dancing are tenuous and not exclusive (e.g. the hunters who hold leaves in **Figs.9.16 and 8.2 above**). Others - tails, whisks held in the hand and arrows of potency - correlate with dancing so strongly that their significance seems demonstrable.

Although they have been discussed separately here, it is clear from the illustrations how many of the diverse attributes are brought together in single figures or compositions. Above the figure holding combs in **Fig.9.18**, another artist has painted a man holding a flail and another with a thin leaf shape tied to one shoulder and holding a short thin stick that we would identify as a dance stick. The line of men in **Fig.9.15** have tufts, tails, whisks and arrows of potency. The juxtaposed lines of men in **Fig.8.5 above**, who were introduced and discussed as hunters in Chapter 8 are sufficiently similar, with their whisks in their hands and arrows of potency, to be reinterpreted as dancers. The unified group of men in **Fig.9.32** have whisks, flails, arrows of potency and dance sticks, discs hanging from their arms, and leaf shapes on their shoulders. Such conjunctions reiterate, reinforce, clarify the associations with dancing for us. They probably did the same and more for the original viewers, who were doubtless able to read them with much greater precision and assurance. Attributes build up the imagery and expand it conceptually as well as visually.

Many of the postures, gestures, clothes and accessories

described here have close parallels to those used by the Kung and other San peoples in their dancing. Others have been tentatively interpreted without ethnographic support. This does not matter. While key elements of prehistoric San beliefs and rituals and even some of the material expressions of them in apparel and accoutrements appear to have survived for millennia, it is foolish to suppose that all did. But for those who cannot see further than the 'ethnographic present' or accept iconography as a valid basis for interpretation, these identifications will carry little conviction.[38] They are correct that it is certainly too early for conviction. I would only claim that these standardised motifs or attributes are recurrent, integral and significant elements in the corpus of Zimbabwean paintings and demand explanation. This seems impossible in terms of tools or weaponry. For the moment, it is at least possible to discern some glimmer of the patterns of associations. These point more firmly in the direction of dance than any other. This may not be absolute but there is some weight behind it.

There is considerable variety in these possible representations of dancing: in their participants, numbers, patterns, movements, steps, clothes, instruments and equipment. All San of whom we have any firm knowledge enjoyed a great many different dances. The universal Kung trance-dance is the Giraffe Dance; but women have their own Drum trance-dance and a Tree trance-dance was developed in comparatively recent times.[39] The traditional Gwi trance dance is the Gemsbok Dance but a newer one is known as the Iron Dance.[40] (These names indicate the source of potency rather than describing the actions of the dances.) Other dances were all less important or frequent; many were sporadic, short-lived and localised. Some were little more than formalised games: Gwi and Nharo girls, for instance, toss melons between each other in a Melon Dance.[41] Others were dramatic enactments of events, like the Gwi Goru Dance in which men reenact a hunt.[42] Many dances were based on animal mimicry, like the Khomani Ostrich Dance or Baboon

Dance: these allowed participants to indulge their imagination and exhibit their agility.[43] Some dances became primarily vehicles for competitive displays of athletic prowess. Some dances, songs and rhythms were individual creations, fashionable for a time but not outliving their creator.[44] Many were restricted to either men or women, or even, like the Xam rainmaking dance, to an age group - elderly men.[45] Some important San ritual dances took place much less frequently than trance dances, sometimes only at intervals of several years. The Eland Dance was celebrated in very similar ways by the Kung, Gwi, Nharo and Xam to mark the onset of puberty.[46] Other ritual dances marked a boy's first kill or initiation to manhood and marriage.[47]

It is apparent that more paintings and the more detailed and complex paintings show men dancing and that in many instances (e.g. **Figs.9.5, 9.11, 9.20 and 9.30**) smaller, less accomplished paintings of smaller groups of women dancing have been inserted later into the panels. People in the paintings illustrated dance in short or long lines (**Figs.9.15, 9.29 and 9.30**), tight-knit groups (**Fig.9.3**) or extended circles (**Fig.9.11**). Participants vary from single individuals, couples (**Figs.9.6 and 9.7**), families together (**Fig.9.14**), men alone (**Figs.9.5, 9.8, 9.11-13, 9.15 and 9.16**), women alone (**Figs.9.8, 9.11, 9.20 and 9.29**) and men, women and children (**Fig.9.3**). Men may dance as animals (**Pls.9.1 and 9.2**), hunters (**Fig.9.16**) or women (**Fig.9.30**) or give a wide range of objects a central role in their dance (**Figs.9.32 and 9.33**). Dance steps are equally varied, ranging from the restrained and formal (**Figs.9.1 and 9.5**) to the wildest abandon (**Fig.9.7** and the men in **Fig.9.8**). Women dancing erotically and alone (**Figs.9.4 and 9.8**) seem in particularly strong antithesis to the communal nature of the trance dance.

Were all these dances performed in order to activate potency or induce trance? Trance dancing culminates in dancers entering trance. As this happens they sway, stagger and fall, often apparently unconscious. Such loss of control and consciousness is characteristic only of trance

dancing.[48] It seems to be happening to several men in **Fig.9.13**. It is even clearer in **Fig.9.34**: six men painted on the horizontal surface of a cave roof and hence without any vertical orientation, have tassels tied to their arms and, save one who might hold a pipe, wave fly whisks, signs that they are dancers. Only one still seems upright; one may still be sitting up but he may be falling backwards; others have collapsed completely with both legs in the air or spread wide; one of these has one foot on the other knee, which we shall see is a diagnostic posture of male trancers.

Paintings of what will be shown in the next chapter to represent trancers are surprisingly seldom juxtaposed with dancers. The most notable exception is in the composition of which **Pls.9.1 and 9.2** are a part: above the dancers is a large recumbent figure painted very like the dancers and which, as we shall again see later, is a characteristic image of a trancer (**Pl.10.1 below**). **Fig.9.8** contains a similar small recumbent figure at the centre of the scene who can be interpreted as a trancer but his relationship with the male dancers is not close and with the female dancers remote and improbable.

Some dancers and dance accessories seem directly and intimately concerned with the activation of potency: we have already seen that many carry arrows of potency. Most of the figures in **Pls.9.1 and 9.2** have circular swellings of their lower chests, above the stomach, and lines streaming down from these swellings. Similar swellings in the abdominal area from which lines emerge occur in the women dancing in **Fig.9.29**. These are not collecting bags: they are not slung from the shoulders, they are not on the backs but in front and they have many more lines emerging from them than any bag. A group of men with greatly enlarged abdomens have also been added below the dancers of **Fig.9.30**. In Chapter 11 we will see that these swellings illustrate a concept similar to the Kung belief that the seat of spiritual potency is the abdomen, which expands when this potency becomes active and "boils over" while the lines coming from it represent the "bursting open" and release of this potency.[49]

The white dots that outline and cover the bodies of the dancers in **Fig.9.14** and emerge from their bodies are so placed and used in such profusion that it is certain that they cannot simply represent beads or body paint. White dots are also painted on the penises and, in the one figure, over the entire body, of dancers in **Pls.9.1 and 9.2.** As we shall see in detail in Chapter 15, white dots primarily signify supernatural potency. The twisted feet and the claws on hands and feet of the dancers in **Fig.9.14** suggest that some of the transformations of the body that the Kung believed were induced by trancing are beginning to take place: they are analysed in Chapter 13. The distorted arms of the pipers in **Fig.9.20** may also indicate the beginning of a process of transformation. The contorted figure in the bottom right hand corner of **Fig.9.13** has been deliberately left armless and the incomplete body, as we shall also see in Chapter 13, is a recurrent feature of the paintings which corresponds to one of the symptoms or consequences of trancing. The attenuated and fleshless bodies of all the men in **Fig.9.15** and the figures holding combs in **Fig.9.19**, pipes in **Figs.9.22 and 9.25** and flails in **Fig.9.31** will also be considered in Chapter 13 and interpreted as representing people experiencing sensations of trance.[50]

Images bringing together attributes of dancing, trancing and potency are thus important components of the art; nevertheless, the modes and attributes of dancing and the participants represented in the Zimbabwe paintings vary so widely and are so deliberately specific that they seem likely to refer to a wider range of dance practices than those used to activate potency or induce trance. It is only possible to sustain the argument that all must represent aspects of trance dancing if the variety of such dances was so wide that trancing was the motive for every form of dance. We have seen that this was not the case amongst those San societies whose dances have been described. If trancing was so universal an intention and consequence of so many different dances, interpretations of representations of these dances simply in these terms lose incisiveness and explanatory power

until and unless the subsidiary connotations inherent in the different motifs used in the graphic system are explored more precisely. It seems likely that the great variety of attributes that may be associated with dancing do not simply define dancing as a whole but that each carries connotations associated with specific dances or particular forms of potency inherent in particular dances and that the artists were taking considerable care to define many different forms of dancing.

NOTES

1. Doke, 1937; Tanaka, 1980: 113-5; Silberbauer, 1965: 97-9, and 1981: 175-7; Guenther, 1986: 251-74.

2. Marshall, 1969, 1976; Lee, 1984; Katz, 1982.

3. Katz, 1982: 32, 35.

4. Katz, 1982: 59-79; Doke, 1937.

5. Lewis-Williams, 1982: 431; see also Biesele, 1983: 5-6.

6. Katz, 1982: 100.

7. Katz, 1982: 37-8.

8. Katz, 1982: 59-79.

9. Katz, 1982: 39-40, 72. Marshall, 1969: 358, mentions the skin cap. Some Xam and Khomani trance dancers wore caps to which animal ears were attached (Lewis-Williams, 1981a: 77; Lewis-Williams and Dowson, 1989: 100).

10. Katz, 1982: 128-9.

11. Katz, 1982: 64.

12. Katz, 1982: 98-100.

13. Katz, 1982: 160-4, 265-73.

14. Goodall, 1959: 44.

15. Burrett, 1990.

16. Though their approach is different, their focus narrower and centred on dance as a prelude to trance, and they have shown little concern for the artistic system as a whole, Lewis-Williams and Dowson, 1989: 38-47, have also identified attributes of dancing in the Drakensberg paintings through correlations between elements in the paintings and Xam and

Kung practices. Such attributes include "bending forward" or "arms back" postures or figures holding fly whisks or supporting themselves on dance sticks.

17. Lewis-Williams, and Dowson, 1989: 44.

18. Although the body is thrown forward in these figures, this is not the same as the "body forward posture" in South Africa which is interpreted as occurring when a trancer's "stomach muscles contract into a tight painful knot" while the arms are extended backwards when trancers "are asking god to put more potency into their bodies" (Lewis-Williams and Dowson, 1989: 40, 44). The Zimbabwe figures are dancers and therefore looser, freer, more variable and dynamic while the posture of the South African trancers is understandably more extreme and rigid. Basic Kung dance postures equivalent to those discussed in this paragraph are described in Katz, 1982: 61, 64, 128.

19. Katz, 1982: 64. Lewis-Williams and Dowson, 1989: 42, also identify this gesture in the paintings and equate it with dancing.

20. Katz, 1982: 129.

21. The dancers and chorus were first illustrated, with very inaccurate sketches, and identified in Tucker and Baird, 1983: 39-40.

22. Katz, 1982: 37-8.

23. Marshall, 1976: 165; Katz, 1982: 16, 166; Tanaka, 1980.

24. Tanaka, 1980; Lewis-Williams, 1981a: 44, using a personal communication from Marshall.

25. Marshall, 1969: 358.

26. Wiessner, personal communication to Dowson in Dowson, 1989: 85.

27. Silberbauer, 1981: 176, 228; Marshall, 1969: 358-9; Katz, 1982: 39; Lewis-Williams and Dowson, 1989: 44.

28. See Chapter 11, **Figs.11.1-3, 11.6-7, 11.15 and 11.16**, for further illustration and discussion of 'combs' in the context of distended figures analysed there.

29. Stow, 1905: 110-11.

30. Armstrong, 1931: 273, Pl.XXXVII: Fig.2; Garlake, 1987a: Figs.43, 65; Genge, 1988; Thornycroft, 1989.

31. If these lines do represent hollow tubes, one other possible use comes to mind, stimulated by accounts of Xam curing practices in which trancers sniffed evil or sickness

from a patient's body though they used no instruments for this. Some forms of pipe might however seem suitable for this but this interpretation is precluded here by the lengths of most of them: they are too long to allow the simultaneous intimate contact or massage of the patient that are essential elements of the curing ritual.

32. Marshall, 1969: 358; Katz, 1982: 39.

33. Lewis-Williams, 1981a: 78; Lewis-Williams and Dowson, 1989: 40, 44.

34. Lewis-Williams, 1981a: 78: "A fly whisk... is another object with which the Kung consider it merely pleasant to dance." He gives no reference for this and neither Marshall nor Katz confirm it. Lewis-Williams and Dowson, 1989: 43.

35. Marshall, 1969: 358.

36. Katz, 1982: 46, 167-8, 214-5.

37. These figures have generally been interpreted as recent non-San warriors because the discs are identified as shields: Goodall, 1959: 40. Cooke, 1964a: 5, Fig.3.9, compares the discs specifically to a "Bechuana" shield.

38. An early version of this chapter was submitted for publication to the South African Archaeological Bulletin. It was rejected by one referee, identified only as a person to whose work I had referred in the notes to this chapter, whose "research has been on ethnography" and who has done "fieldwork among the Ghanzi Bushmen": which suggests that it may be Prof. Mathias Guenther of the University of Toronto. He found almost all aspects of it "spurious and gratuitous imposition of meaning... spurious, opportunistic and unconvincing... contrived and specious... Victorian...". His reasons were that, in almost every case, "there appear to be no ethnographic descriptions of any of the scenes... little if any reference to ethnography... lack [of] any referent in San ethnography... ethnographic analogies cannot be drawn" and so on. He concluded "very few of the depicted dances seem to me to be trance dances" but gave no reasons. A second anonymous referee asserted that "most of the pictures in fact illustrate trance dancers" but again gave no reasons for this completely contradictory and even more emphatic judgement. This experience gives some indication of the problems of writing on rock paintings for southern Africa. (Letter and enclosures from the Editor, South African Archaeological Bulletin, to me, 8 January, 1991).

39. Katz, 1982: 50-1.

40. Silberbauer, 1981: 176.

41. Tanaka, 1980: 113-4; Guenther, 1986: 253.

42. Tanaka, 1980.

43. Doke, 1937: 97.

44. Guenther, 1986: 254.

45.

46. Silberbauer, 1965: 87; Tanaka, 1980: 101; Guenther, 1986: 278-81; Lewis-Williams, 1981a: Ch.4; Katz, 1982: 51.

47. Lewis-Williams, 1981a: Chs.5 and 6.

48. Katz, 1982: 40, 99.

49. Katz, 1982: 41-2, 45, 96, 98.

50. Lewis-Williams and Dowson believe fish are an indicator of trancing (Lewis-Williams and Dowson, 1989: 55-7, 86). For those who accept their conclusion, the large fish superimposed on **Fig.9.11** and the small fish-like shapes hanging from the line in the same figure, top centre, may suggest a further connotation of trance in the images discussed in this chapter.

10. TRANCING AND TRANCERS

Frobenius was the first to recognize that one of the most important images in the paintings in Zimbabwe was a recumbent male figure, sometimes painted so large and with such care, detail and elaboration that it dominated all the paintings around it. He interpreted these figures as "pietas", commemorations of the deaths of divine kings, sacrificed for the good of their people, and of the rituals and ceremonies that surrounded their burials.[1] Cripps, perhaps influenced by him, also recognized the numbers and importance of these recumbent figures in frequent association, he believed, with dancers and people holding their heads in "grief" and "mourning". For him, these scenes represented "funerary ceremonies" "perpetuating the memory of leaders and great men and brave men".[2]

Pl.10.1 is one of the largest and most intricately detailed of these figures. The ways that it has been explained neatly epitomise how every researcher has allowed his or her personal preconceptions to determine interpretation. Goodall followed Frobenius and described this and other paintings like it as "memorials to dead 'kings'". She went on to interpret the figure as "wrapped in bandages and ready for burial" though the figure was "not absolutely dead" for it was able to continue to "observe the living through the medium of a mask".[3] Amongst those who favoured the most literal interpretations of the paintings, Cooke saw it and others like it as exemplifying the indolence of Bantu males as opposed to the industry of their women, a perception that he believed must have struck the Later Stone Age artists as forcibly as it stimulated the prejudices of white colonists.[4] Woodhouse, as always reducing every image to the lowest possible cultural denominator and rejecting anyone or anything that seeks to go even slightly beyond the most banal reality of his own particular milieu, dismissed the figure as "reminiscent of someone enjoying a glorious beer drink".[5]

It is worth examining its formal programme in detail.

The man's body is elongated and both it and his limbs lack the curves of muscle and flesh. Although he lies stretched out on his back, he is not sprawled: his left hand is holding but scarcely propping up the back of his head while his right hand raises an oval object. His left leg is slightly bent and his right so contracted that his right foot rests lightly and carefully on his left knee. This position would only be possible if the right leg were upright, balanced and consciously controlled. The careful placing of the left hand and right foot and the balance of the right leg are sufficient indication that he is in full control of his body. He is both prostrate and fully conscious. His left hand draws particular attention to his head: the seat of the principal faculties and of conscious activity. He can be identified as a sable dancer for he lies above and dominates the Sable Dance described in the previous chapter, **Pls.9.1 and 9.2 above**, and was painted by the same artist; his relationship with the sable antelope and with the other sable dancers is made certain by his facial decoration which is that of a sable and matches that of many of the dancers. The form of the head and face is also that of many of the dancers and is one of the characteristic head shapes in the art and determined by the general principles of the art: it does not represent a mask. Within the angle of his leg and body sit two small figures.

There are many correspondences between the features of this figure and a San trancer in deep or full trance. For the Kung, the entry into trance begins with profuse sweating and loss of control of the body. The trancer staggers and sways, feels weightless, cannot stand and has violent and uncontrolled spasms and movements. On entry into deep, full trance, he slips to the ground or crashes down suddenly, rigid as a board with physical tension, or limp and almost lifeless. Full trance for the Kung is to die, 'pure and simple', not metaphorically but in some real sense; the soul is said to leave the body.[6] The trancer at this point must regain control of himself for, if he is to heal, he must above all first 'see properly', see within his patient with

a cool, penetrating, steady-eyed stare, be his eyes open or shut, to diagnose the problems before he starts to cure them.[7] Trancers in full trance need care and protection. They become a focus of attention and others, especially women, will move beside them, support and massage them.

The figure of **Pl.10.1** has many of these attributes: he has been a participant in a dance but now lies outside it; he is fully conscious, even calm and concentrated, but cannot stand and lies inert, without muscles and so incapable of independent movement; particular attention is drawn to the head. The two small figures are reminiscent of those who attend and support trancers.

The smaller darker monochrome figure added by another artist just below him repeats the positions of the legs and probably the arms almost identically. The posture is therefore not idiosyncratic or fortuitous but has some precise content. It is indeed repeated again and again in paintings throughout Zimbabwe. General indicators of full trance in Zimbabwe can thus be taken to include the recumbent position, bent leg, the hand holding the head, the attenuated limbs, the absence of flesh or muscle, and the simultaneous suggestions of mental control and physical loss of control.

In **Fig.10.1,** the essential trance posture is repeated in a man who lies beneath a fine painting of a zebra, delineated only by its dark stripes. We shall see in Chapter 12 that the zebra, of all the ordinary game animals, comes closest to the large and dangerous beasts in the symbolism of potency. The two bent but upright legs of the figure are shown with similar economy for, though the thighs are omitted, the artist's intentions remain absolutely clear.

In **Fig.10.2**, an isolated panel, an extremely elongated man lies face down with his legs stretched out to their full extent and with one arm bent and the hand almost touching his neck: a position indicative of at least partial control of his limbs. A large number of bush pigs, immature and adult, standing and lying down, and perhaps one sheep, are painted over and around him and thus associate the trancer with another species of animal. At the centre of **Fig.10.3**

another figure takes on the characteristic posture of trance, lying on his back with leg bent and hands to his head. His body is considerably distorted, lengthened but not attenuated and with disproportionately small arms and, even more, calf and foot. These proportions are repeated in the other human figures in the panel and, as we have seen in Chapter 7, are probably a local stylistic idiosyncrasy. Though the genders and roles of the hunters and gatherers are well defined, they are far from human with their gaping mouths and bizarre objects in their hands. The trancer only has one leg, and close study of the painting makes clear that this is deliberate. It is repeated in two small trunked, elephant-like animals below him which both have only one foreleg and one hind leg. The trancer is almost surrounded by the heads of small antelope, probably duiker, horned and hornless and hence male and female in approximately equal numbers. This is almost the only instance so far known where what seem to be dismembered portions of animals were painted: an extraordinary image because, unlike almost any other painting, it reduces the living creature to a product, meat. (Another example is the dismembered warthog head impaled on a withy in **Fig.9.15 above.**) Its meaning is elusive except that it suggests yet another qualification and elucidation of a more precise power of trance, in this case perhaps related in some way to the killing or perhaps spirits of small antelope.[8]

We have already encountered other examples of recumbent men in the position of trance set in a context of dancing. The very large assembly of men and women, including two groups of dancers and a chorus of clapping figures, see **Fig.9.8 above**, has already been discussed as illustrating the periodic assembly of several different bands and typifying the larger community. Right at its centre, below an amorphous blob that could represent the dance fire, a single recumbent figure with both legs bent, upright and together is holding his neck or the lower part of his head with one hand. His attitude is so different from the rest, who are shown standing and moving within a limited range of stereotyped

gestures and postures, and his placing is so central that, despite the smallness of the image, he stands out as the focus of the whole composition. Here the recumbent trancer is very carefully located in the midst of an elaborate dance composition. All activity centres round him and he holds the scene together: visually, he seems the purpose of the whole assembly.

In **Fig.8.17 above**, a recumbent figure whose proportions and taut outline indicate that it is a man, lies with his knees up below the group of women encamped and beside the line of what is probably the same group of women. We have already noticed the strange dark stripes that decorate their bodies and the even more unusual way that their upper limbs are given an abrupt thickening: elements which suggest that this is more than an ordinary scene. In **Fig.14.11 below**, the remnant of a recumbent elongated figure is juxtaposed with three creatures with claws and long tusks which, as we shall see in Chapter 14, are both emblems of the transformation that is a consequence of some trancing.

The nature and strength of some of the forces that can emanate from the trancer, apparently inert and powerless, is made visible in **Fig.10.4**. Two parallel multicolored lines rise straight up, turn twice through right angles and then change into a curvilinear shape, bent into many tight snake-like curves as it doubles back on itself and ends in a head with large ears like a kudu's and a pointed muzzle. Figures approach this device from the base, crawl up it, hold onto the lines and congregate towards the head. Centred immediately below all this, with a precision that demonstrates an intentional relationship, lies a small prone trancer, both legs bent and upright. In this case the prone figure holds its abdomen, the seat of potency,[9] which can be read as the source and root of the great structure that rises above it. The forces within a trancer are here given dramatic form, rising from his body and powerful enough to attract, control or at least create circumstances of dependence for many small figures, before transforming into a great snake-like creature. At the top of the composition,

two figures hold short sticks and bend so far forward that their bodies are parallel to the ground: they seem most likely to be dancers and to have been at least in part intended to situate the whole composition within a dance context.

The careful conflations, juxtapositions and associations, trancer-sable, trancer-zebra, trancer-pigs, trancer-duiker, trancer-adorned women, trancer-clawed and tusked creatures and trancer-supernatural snake, in these paintings are intentional but the nature of the relationships they imply is uncertain. In San terms, they would probably be thought of either as signifying a transmission of potency from one to the other - the direction of influence is uncertain; or denoting different aspects of the same concept or quality; or qualifying the nature of the concept represented; or denoting an equivalence or relationship between them; or denoting a process of transformation from one to the other.[10] The presence of the trancer means that this transmission, quality or concept must be concerned with trancing. It is possible to interpret these images as representing potency acquired from sable, zebra and pig or from their dances, in particular a Sable Dance, and perhaps a Zebra Dance or a Bushpig Dance. They could also be interpreted as representing influences from the trancers being transmitted to the animals. The potency emitted by a trancer in full trance is concretised and made visible by emissions from the body that are perceived also as a supernatural snake. Trance potency is also able to cause the deaths of antelope, to reduce them to dismembered heads, or to reside in such heads.

The archetype of the recumbent male trancer and the postures of trance can appear almost everywhere, in the most diverse circumstances and situations. **Fig.10.5** includes three recumbent figures. The one at the top echoes the posture of the great trancer in **Pl.10.1** almost exactly, though the left leg is more tightly bent and the foot is not resting on the opposing knee. He holds his head with one hand and his knee with the other. The recumbent figure

towards the bottom does not hold his head but one hand rests on a bent knee. The figure slightly below him holds both his upright knee and his head and may indeed be propping up his head. There seems to be little relationship between these figures and the many very different figures around them by different artists that make up the rest of the panel: gatherers with their sticks; a woman standing holding her head with both hands - a posture that is an extension of the characteristic gesture of the trancer and seems in itself also to have been indicative of trance; hunters, including one with arrows with large triangular heads - the arrows of potency; a figure with what seems to be a heavy horned head and thus a masked dancer; the outline of a figure holding short thick sticks in both her outstretched hands - accoutrements of dancing; and another outline, probably of a woman holding her head. Thus, in this panel, beside the recumbent trancers, many of the other less obvious elements in the imagery of many different artists in this panel connote dancing or trancing.

Large panels of paintings almost always include figures, often insignificant in size and placement, whose attitudes and gestures show that they are connected with trancing. One example suffices: there is a prone male holding his neck on the rump of the outline elephant in **Fig.1.1 above**. A woman stands beside him holding her head.

The image of the recumbent figure or the figure holding its head also frequently appears in what seem purely domestic situations. A large painting of a camp, a purely domestic scene with parents and children, families surrounded by their possessions, **see Fig.8.21 above**, includes one man who, though painted vertically, is obviously recumbent and once more has a leg bent, balanced and controlled, with one foot resting on the other knee, and holds his head. Another, sitting, does the same. They contrast with others in the same scene in less controlled, more relaxed and abandoned attitudes.

The group of women and children encamped in **Fig.8.19 above** includes some of the very few examples of women adopting the overwhelmingly male posture of the recumbent

trancer. Two of the women are lying down. One of these has one leg bent and one hand to her head. She holds her other hand out to a child. The other, completely prone, holds her head in both hands. Two standing women also hold their heads. This repeated gesture, drawing attention to the head if not so obviously to trance, introduces a new significance to the scene. Read in conjunction with so many other depictions of the same gesture, it points to the latent metaphysical power inherent in even the most ordinary circumstances. By itself this is still too slight an indication for certainty but the entire background of the scene is a large design of oval shapes and these, we shall see in Chapter 15, are the most important of all the symbols in Zimbabwe for trance potency. The scene is also juxtaposed to a very large scene on the adjoining boulder of a similar number of men hunting a large unidentifiable animal, **Fig.12.12 below**, which will be shown in Chapter 12 to signify trance as death. This is its feminine counterpart, its significance established most securely by the oval shapes but with repeated reminders of the pervasive presence of the powers of trance in the women's gestures. The signs may be slight but the way they alter content is considerable.

Fallen figures

As a trancer begins to enter full trance, he loses control of his balance, sways, needs support or falls.[11] In the paintings, many figures appear to doing this and others seem completely unconscious or dead. We have already seen them, for instance, among the dancers of **Fig.9.13 above.** They contrast with the careful dispositions of the bodies of the archetypal trancer. The panel of paintings of **Fig.10.6** is a compilation by several different artists: there is a carefully composed archetype of the family, father sitting, mother bending forward and both stretching an arm towards the child between them; walking away from them is a line of hunters, led by two gatherers by a different artist: archetypes of the male, female and family roles in society. The panel is dominated by the large prone male figure, top left, who lies on his back with one knee bent: he may lack

the clarity, precision and range of diagnostic attributes of other paintings of trancers but seems almost certainly to belong with them. Many other figures in the panel have elements that appear to allude to trance and together form a subtle and pervasive continuation of this theme. Above the main figure, another fallen figure faces him, one foot on the other knee, face down and with one arm raised. Below the family are two hunters falling forward, bodies horizontal, legs kicking the air, arms outstretched. Beside them, on the left, a third hunter sways, his body in a curve and almost horizontal, his legs carrying no weight. Just below him is the small distorted figure of a hunter sitting, his legs bent beneath him; though the proportions of the rest of him are normal, his arms are reduced to two thin angular lines; they clutch his chest. Right at the bottom, overlaid by a sable, is a much larger figure whose limbs are still further reduced, in sharp contrast to his large head and body and detailed face. His legs are bent double under his body and his arms end in claw-like talons, one to his forehead and the other waving. Finally, below the falling hunter on the right are the torso and thighs of a figure, whose head and lower legs are deliberately omitted.

Here, in a small panel of paintings, different artists have reproduced almost the full range of the sensations and results of entry into trance: loss of balance, swaying, falling, chest pains, loss of muscles or muscle power, transformation to bony, ethereal unreality, becoming the incomplete fragment and husk of a full human being.[12] They all contrast markedly with the static upright figures around them, with their controlled gestures, interacting with each other, members of families and groups.

In **Fig.12.14 below** two figures are sprawled on their backs, one at least the victim of a hunt for he is surrounded by hunters and shot through with many arrows. As we shall see in Chapter 12, through his death he becomes a symbol for an aspect of trance - not just its close resemblance to death but its identity with death. To judge from his posture, perhaps he and figures like him are not yet experiencing deep

trance in the same controlled, conscious way as the archetype. The hunter in **Fig.15.10 below** also lies sprawled face down but is, as we shall see in Chapter 15, associated with oval shapes closely enough for us to suggest that he also is a trancer.

Healing

The Kung trancer who has experienced the death of full trance, may then experience rebirth as a healer. After he has "seen properly" and deeply into the interior and spirit of his patient, he commences curing. This may involve only a "laying on of hands" and massage of the patient's body, as the trancer's vibrating hands pass over him, seeking out the illness and transferring the trancer's potency to the patient and the evil from patient into the trancer. Contact can also be much more intimate as the trancer seeks maximum body contact, wraps himself around the patient, rubs his body and head against him. The evil, described in one case as "little bits of metal" enters the trancer. He then expels it from himself, throwing his arms out with violent shaking and shrieks.[13] Xam procedures were similar to those of the Kung. Curers placed their noses against their patients to sniff or "snore" out the causes of their illness and then sneezed these out and away, visibly manifest as "very pretty things like sticks", or as lions, butterflies or owls.[14]

There is another important function of massage. Massage of the back of a trancer and the rubbing of fat on it was an important procedure for the Xam, to assist the trancer in controlling his potency and harnessing it to healing and preventing him growing "bristles", "hair" or a "mane" in these places, signs that he was beginning to be transformed into an animal, particularly a lion, epitome of dangerous and uncontrolled potency.[15]

Of the two figures in **Fig.10.7**, one is crouched forward, passive, legs bent and arms straight down. The other bends over him and holds, rubs or massages the small of his back in the characteristic posture and action of a healer or one attendant on a trancer. Both figures also have single curved tusks coming from their faces: this, as we shall see in

Chapter 14, is a specific emblem signifying that a process of transformation is taking place. A similar scene is included among the paintings shown in **Pl.16.1 below.** These are two of the very few paintings that seem to depict the act of curing so directly. This rarity is not unexpected given that the canon of the art is focussed on archetypes and not on activities. Once again we see that procedures are not generally illustrated, though key attributes of a healer might be.

Sweat

The exertion and excitement of dancing induces profuse sweating. Entering trance does the same to an even greater degree. The Kung believe that the sweat that appears on a trancer's body is trance potency made visible, the visible expression of potency, potency itself. As boiling water is transformed into steam vapour so boiling potency is transformed into sweat. Trancers therefore often rub their sweat on patients as part of the curing procedure. Sweat from different parts of the body has different degrees of potency; that from the armpits is considered particularly potent.[16]

Though images of the archetypal trancer never have any indications of sweat, it is represented elsewhere in the paintings. Lines from armpits are painted on the gatherers in **Fig.8.15 above** and on one of the elongate hunters in the trance composition of **Fig.10.3 above**, where they end in tufts which, as we shall see in Chapter 14, are very similar to an emblem attached to the penises of many men. Particularly fine lines, in sets of three, come from both the armpits and stomachs of little hunters with gaping mouths in **Fig.14.10 below**; one has lines streaming from his elbows as well. Similar lines flow even more profusely from the open circular shapes that two of them carry. Streams of dots emanate from the armpits of the dancers in **Fig.9.14 above** and the figure with a distended stomach in **Fig.11.3 below.** We shall see in Chapter 16 how dots represent not simply sweat but also active potency; and in Chapter 11 how the distension of the figure is the result of her potency being activated and

starting to 'boil'. Both images thus confirm that for the artists of Zimbabwe as for the Kung, sweat was indeed potency made visible.

Nasal bleeding

The heat, exertion and stress of the trance dance often induce nose bleeds in the dancers. The Xam believed a trancer's nasal blood was again a powerful curative agent, its effectiveness being in its smell in particular. Trancers rubbed, painted or anointed patients with blood from their noses. They did the same for novice trancers during the trance dance, to 'make their gorge rise' and thus activate their potency and induce trance.[17] It may be that the retching induced by the smell of blood was a visible demonstration of its power, that it reproduced a sensation experienced as potency became active. There are some indications that the Kung recognized the same powers.[18]

Though rarely depicted and again never associated with the archetype of the trancer, nasal bleeding is the most precise, readily visible, external, physical symptom of an interior state depicted and recognizable in the paintings. It is in some ways the most unmistakable and convincing indicator of trance in the art because it does not presume a system of metaphors like that which has caused so much argument in South Africa.[19] In Zimbabwe its representation is handled differently to that generally used in the southern paintings and is a great deal clearer, more dramatic and rarer.

On one rock face there are three separate scenes in which several figures bleed in the same way. **Fig.10.8**, at the right side of the panel, has two figures with large ears and pointed muzzles sitting on the cusps of a design based on a line of oval shapes. They hold onto the ovals and their arms are reduced to stick-like forms and their torsoes to elongated triangles. Both have two parallel vertical lines of blood coming from the points of their muzzles.

Fig.11.3 below, on the right hand edge of the panel, includes another figure with fleshless limbs and torso but with a conventional human head, who crawls along one of a

pair of lines coming from a female figure with a distended stomach. It will be seen later that the locations of these bleeding figures - the oval shapes and the distended figures - are both themselves recurrent and powerful symbols of potency. This is a demonstration of the association of a particular physical symptom produced in trance with two of the important modes of representation of potency.

A pair of men at the top of the panel, **Fig.11.4 below**, walk together, erect and each carrying a short stick upright in front of him and with an array of tufts, leaves and lines on his head and a single tusk curving out and up from the front of his muzzle. Both have two long straight lines that it seems must represent blood flowing down from the front of their muzzles. One has a hunting bag from which pokes a long stick on the end of which stands a small unidentifiable animal with long ears and a long tail. Below them another artist has painted a one-legged figure, crouching and holding his arms straight out behind his back, who may also bleed from his face.

No archetypal recumbent trancer is ever shown bleeding from face or nose. In the paintings, sweating, bleeding and succumbing to deep trance were mutually exclusive indicators. Bleeding seems to have indicated a different stage, level or aspect of trance. It can perhaps be taken to typify the healer rather than the trancer. Because it was so rarely painted, one can suggest that the curing aspect of trance, a specific and limited activity was seen as only one aspect of trancing, less archetypal than trancing itself. The archetype was the recumbent trancer rather than the curer. The many precise indications defining the archetype were considered sufficient in themselves to make the meaning of the images clear and indications of bleeding were thus superfluous.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have been able to focus on more or less direct, straightforward and what seem comparatively easily interpretable illustrations of trancers, denoted by the positions of their bodies and limbs. We have paid much less

attention to additional attributes than we were forced to do in considering dancing: indeed there seem to be remarkably few associated with the trancing archetype - posture was apparently enough.[20] Images of trancers rarely form parts of recognizable scenes and trancers are as rarely shown actively engaged in practices associated with trancing. More than other archetypes, they find their significance in juxtaposed sets of images and it is these, their relationships and contexts, which, as always, require careful consideration. In contrast to the archetype, there are many other and more divers figures who sweat and bleed, emitting the two bodily fluids believed to be particularly potent and thus exhibiting two of the most easily illustrated and identifiable symptoms of trance.

NOTES

1. Frobenius, 1931b: 27-8.

2. Cripps, 1941a: 35.

3. Goodall, 1959: 98.

4. Cooke, 1964c, 1979.

5. Lee and Woodhouse, 1970: 79.

6. Katz, 1982: 97-100.

7. Katz, 1982: 105.

8. Pager, 1983, interprets this composition as depicting a hunting shrine.

9. Katz, 1982: 45.

10. To say that the figures are 'dreaming' pigs or zebra would be both naive and incorrect for the figure is not sleeping and, as far as we know, dreams did not play an important role in any San beliefs.

11. Katz, 1982: 46, 98.

12. Katz, 1982: 98.

13. Katz, 1982: 106-9.

14. Bleek, 1935: 1-6, 21-2, 34.

15. Bleek, 1935: 2, 5.

16. Marshall, 1962: 251; Katz, 1982: 106-8; Lewis-Williams, 1981a: 81, writes that he was told by a Kung informant that the smell of sweat also keeps spirits away.

17. Bleek, 1935: 12-13, 19-20, 34-5.

18. Marshall and Katz make no mention of nasal bleeding or the use of blood in curing. Later, Marshall has said she saw only one trancer bleed from his nose but Biesele found some Kung trancers did use their blood in curing a person who was very sick: Marshall and Biesele in communications to Lewis-Williams (Lewis-Williams, 1981a: 81).

19. In South Africa this phenomenon has been recognized in several paintings, the blood being represented there by small red lines or whisker-like flecks across the face: Lewis-Williams, 1981a: Figs.19 and 20, 81; Lewis-Williams and Dowson, 80-1.

20. Trance was represented in South Africa rather differently from Zimbabwe. There seem to be few recumbent figures comparable to those of Zimbabwe - only one has been illustrated (Lewis-Williams, 1981a: 82) though this shows the same leg position as that characteristic of Zimbabwe trancers. The comprehensive records by Pager of Ndedema and the Amis Gorge show no comparable images. Trance has been recognized in South African paintings in figures with quite different positions - kneeling, bent forward and with rigid arms, through nasal bleeding, but primarily through a large range of metaphors, including death, flight, being underwater which is denoted by fish, fighting and by illustrations of real or believed consequences of trance, such as various forms of hallucination or partial or total transformation into animals (Lewis-Williams and Dowson, 1989: 50-76).

11. DISTENDED FIGURES

There is a particularly striking, strange, complex and predominantly female image found only in paintings in Zimbabwe.[1] It is most notable for its large size, frontal viewpoint, grossly swollen abdomen, splayed legs, lines emerging from between its legs to which smaller semi-human creatures sometimes cling and the variety of objects held or attached to it. It has attracted as much interest and speculation as the male trancer. Frobenius saw examples only in central and eastern Mashonaland, where they sometimes have large ears on top of their heads and long pointed muzzles (e.g. **Fig.11.7**). As a result, he emphasised what he saw as their animal characteristics and interpreted them as fabelhasen or hasenmenschen, mythical hares or 'hare-people'.[2] He ignored the swollen bodies and the dominance of female characteristics and saw the long lines that emerged from the bodies as streams of urine or water. With his belief that the paintings reflected myths that survived in comparatively recent Shona traditions, he then interpreted them as concerned with rain and the nourishment of the earth with water and rivers.

Goodall emphasised the female characteristics of these "huge, bulbous... voluminous... gross... ugly... sub-human... obscene" figures.[3] She believed that they must "illustrate a story", "belong to a story", be "illustrations of legends" and have a "source in ancient mythology". Because she accepted without question that all art throughout the world originated from the art of Upper Palaeolithic Europe, she presumed that these figures were the African counterpart to the group of small so-called 'Venus figurines' found in European archaeological deposits of that period, which also have swollen bodies and greatly enlarged female sexual characteristics and were then generally believed to be symbols of fertility and procreation. On these grounds, she interpreted the Zimbabwe figures as comparable representations of "the great 'first mother' who produced the people of the world", the "primeval mother", the "goddess of

fertility".[4]

In complete contrast, Cooke, convinced that many paintings were observations of activities of Iron Age farmers, suggested that the swollen figures might represent Iron Age iron smelting furnaces.[5] Many such furnaces in Zimbabwe were constructed in the form of a woman or had female sexual characteristics moulded on their walls. The molten slag ran out from an orifice between the legs. This probably reflected traditional beliefs that the furnaces gave birth to iron and equated smelting with creation and childbirth. Moreover, furnaces were generally built in secluded spots away from settlement where, Cooke suggested, they could easily be observed in operation by San artists "who could hide behind a blade of grass".

Goodall's interpretation survives in continued insistence that the most significant aspects of these images are their references to women, pregnancy and childbirth. These have been given a new context in San trancing. "In most cases trance figures dance along the wavy lines emanating from the mother goddess figures... The mother goddess figures, then, are another category of paintings where some kind of potency is being exploited for trance; in this case the potency appears to be a fluid." In considering the nature of the fluid, consideration was given first to menstrual blood, because some San "believe that menstrual blood is extraordinarily potent". This interpretation was however rejected because San rituals connected with menstruation do not involve trancing. "Therefore alternative possibilities need to be considered. One alternative concerns amniotic fluid, another supernaturally important substance." The conclusion was that "Whatever the case, the explanation for these mother goddess figures involves trance and potency in some way."[6] This is probably correct but the way it was reached here was deeply flawed and based on a very limited and superficial knowledge of the figures, derived almost entirely from Goodall's and Frobenius' illustrations. Careful consideration of a representative range of the images would have shown that the figures are not all female, not

pregnant, the lines are not a fluid, or the figures on them dancing, trancing or even certainly human.

Some examples in detail

Five sites within six miles of each other in north-eastern Mashonaland have particularly large detailed and elaborate examples of these figures. **Fig.11.1**, from a large but shallow cave, shows a pair of women; both have pronounced muzzles with tusks coming out of them and 'manes' of short, straight lines down the backs of their heads. Both may also have had tufts on the tops of their heads.[7] Short thick lines with frayed ends emerge from the armpit of one and both sides of the chest of the other. The principal figure - on the right - generates a single very long thick meandering line. She holds a leaf shape in one hand and a similar but less clear shape in the other and has combs attached to both arms: the straps of one hang down beneath it and one of the leaf shapes in her hands has similar lines suspended from it. The lesser figure has enlarged genitalia but emits no lines. She holds a crescent and a comb, both with straps, and has a leaf attached to one arm and a comb to the other.

A single figure is painted towards the end of the line generated by the principal figure, crouched low and holding the line, its head twisted upwards with a large tusk coming from the muzzle and two lines flowing down from the stomach.[8] It has only one leg and one arm and a tuft attached to its buttocks. The line ends in tassels resembling the hair on the end of an elephant's tail. There is a tasselled end of a similar line beside it as well as the ends of two further broad lines. The origins of the last three lines cannot now be traced to any figures.

There is another pair of these figures in the same cave, **Pl.11.1**, but they are much simpler, have no indication of their sex and do not generate lines or subsidiary figures. The only object held is a very large crescent in the right hand of one of them.

Fig.11.2 shows a similar pair of figures at a second site: an otherwise insignificant boulder, one of many in open land. Both are women: both have manes, elaborated by white

lines, and white stripes down their faces; and both also have a great many white lines on both arms, above and below the elbow, presumably representing strings of shell beads. The main figure also has lines of white dots like girdles across chest and waist; a comb and leaf on her right arm and a leaf in her right hand. Her left hand is damaged. Short thick lines emerge from both sides of her chest. The lines that come from between her legs only survive for a short distance and no figures are attached to them. The lesser figure has two tufts on her head and holds leaf shapes in both hands.

A third site, one of the larger painted caves, has another large painting of a pair of these figures: **Pl.11.2.** They are almost identical in all their attributes. Both have manes and tufts on their heads, white lines on their upper and fore arms and four bands of white dots across their bodies: at shoulders, chest and above and below their abdomens. They also both have tassels attached to their knees. Lines emerge from both sides of both their upper chests. Both hold leaf shapes in both hands and have combs on both arms. The principal figure - once more on the right - has two broad lines coming from between her legs.

Eleven figures are attached to or just above the top line (see **Fig.11.18**).[9] All have only one arm and one leg and adopt a stiff and unnatural crouched posture, holding the line and perhaps crawling along it though it is difficult to suggest motion where the subject has only one leg. Few are given any indication of sex. The three most elaborate have their heads twisted right round to face backwards and upwards, with a tusk which also points upwards attached to their muzzles; and bear many white lines both above and below the elbow of their arm. The fourth site, a large exposed rock face, has four more of the figures. They are not in pairs though in one instance the principal figure does have a much smaller partner. **Fig.11.3** has been damaged by exfoliation but sufficient remains to show that it is a woman. She holds a large crescent in one hand and probably a leaf in the other; and has a mane and two large tufts on her head. Instead of the short thick lines, flecks emerge

from the left side of her chest or abdomen and from her right armpit. Two irregular zig-zag lines come from between her legs. A figure crouches on one of them, facing away from the woman; it has a face with a pronounced muzzle from which two straight lines flow down, indicating that it is bleeding from its mouth or nose. Its arms are straight and clasp the line; its knees are bent and its body and limbs without form or detail.

A second large, pale distended figure, **Fig.11.4**, is at the centre of the main panel of paintings. Its sex is not explicit; it holds a large crescent and has a comb on its right arm. Two pairs of thin parallel lines emerge from between its legs and curve in great regular undulations across the panel. There are no figures attached to them but a great many figures were later painted over these lines. A smaller figure with the same distended body and legs spread wide, stands beside it. On its other side (**Fig.12.15 below**) is a fallen man in a different pigment, his body pierced by a great many arrows.

Fig.11.5, isolated high on the same rock face, shows a fourth figure with a grossly bloated abdomen. It is small and the three irregular horizontal lines beneath it, though in the same pigment and part of the same image, do not emanate from the body. Three hunters were painted later and partly over it. The large central hunter holds arrows of potency, with large crossed and barbed heads in both hands which are unlike the arrows in his shoulder bag or those of both the other hunters.

The fifth site in the vicinity can no longer be located but a distended figure from it has been illustrated.[10] It holds crescents in both hands, has combs attached to both arms and emits lines from chest and elbows. It has a mane and other lines come from the forehead. There are two figures on the two broad lines that come from it, one bending forward and holding a line but standing free of it; the other walks upright towards the end of the line. Both seem to bleed from their pronounced muzzles.

Fig.11.6 is in central Mashonaland. A female figure

holds combs pointing downwards in both hands. Her rounded ears, pronounced muzzle and open mouth give her a bear-like appearance and so, with great puzzlement, she has been generally described.[11] This resemblance is quite fortuitous and there is actually nothing significantly different in the details of her head from that in many other paintings of humans. Two carefully drawn parallel zig-zag lines emerge from her enlarged genitals. Another figure in central Mashonaland, **Fig.11.7**, has no indication of its sex. Most of its right arm and leg and part of the right side of its abdomen have now exfoliated. It has long, upright, pointed ears on top of its head, a long muzzle and suggestions of a mane. The body is heavily decorated with white paint that seem to indicate strings of beads on the neck, upper and lower arms and calves; and striped body paint on face, arms, legs and torso. It holds a comb shape upwards in the hand that survives. The great swelling curve of the lower body is particularly striking, turning the abdomen into a huge sagging receptacle. Three parallel zig-zag lines emerge from between the legs and seventeen small and rudimentary creatures hold onto both sides of the lines and crawl on all fours towards and away from the main figure. They seem curiously carelessly painted, with no precision or detail and no sense of the human form, in sharp contrast to the size and detail of the main figure.

Variations of the figures

Large and fully detailed figures with the full range of attributes are comparatively rare. However many small frontal figures with swollen bodies, legs apart and arms raised, can be recognized as rudimentary, 'shorthand' sketches of the full images. **Fig.11.8** is a small, simple image which retains all the important diagnostic features of the archetype and holds a large crescent, the prime emblem of it. At the bottom right of **Fig.1.1 above** is a pair of even simpler figures with no attributes of the complete image except the shapes of their bodies and postures.

Fig.11.9 in the north of Mashonaland shows a woman with long lines emerging from between her legs but not the

characteristic distended body. She has a concave face and a sharply pointed muzzle; a short line comes from the left armpit; and a single tasselled apron swings from her waist and exposes her enlarged vagina. Two thin lines, one curved and tangled, emerge from it. There are no figures attached to these lines but the tangled one seems to entrap an earlier grotesque swaying figure, sexless, thin and weightless, with the large ears of a kudu, an antelope muzzle and possibly a tail. A similar female figure beside it wears a tasselled apron like the main figure and supports herself with a long stick. Beside the main figure is a second figure with the same face and whose legs are in the same position, seen from the front, bent and apart. It is, perhaps, her partner. The main figure's abdomen is not enlarged yet she generates lines, though now they are much less carefully controlled and encircle and 'capture' earlier figures rather than attract new ones. These seem significant extensions of the concepts underlying all these images.

Fig.11.10, not far from the figure just described, is sexless, with none of the attached attributes or emanations so far described. It appears to be spreadeagled between, or holding two long straight vertical lines. Small sketches of similar figures, some who also have characteristic zig-zag lines coming from them, were illustrated by Frobenius from central Mashonaland.[12] It may be that the long 'staffs' held vertically by these figures are a variant of the zig-zag lines. The small figure sketched in **Fig.12.11** has a swollen abdomen and maned head, and holds a leaf in one hand and a long stick in the other. In **Figs.11.12** and **11.13**, the entire torsoes are so inflated that they become almost spherical and their limbs and heads become tiny appendages to their bodies. In **Fig.11.13**, one otherwise sexless figure holds a leaf shape and probably a bow and bundle of arrows and in the second figure, a woman in profile, it is made quite clear that it is the abdomen specifically that is spherical; lines flow down from it and two longer lines, perhaps corresponding to the lines that emanate from the principal archetype, stand out from behind the legs. Other

naive, direct and unstereotyped but vivid sketches show women from the side and in movement, yet with distended stomachs and with lines that spurt out and flow away from almost every part of the body and limbs (e.g. the figure superimposed on the lovers in **Fig.8.23 above**). There are indeed so many of these small images that the theme becomes almost ubiquitous. With some it is almost impossible to tell what is represented: **Fig.11.14** could well represent a pair of tortoises or turtles.[13]

Many of the characteristics of the distended figures are represented in less dramatic forms in many other paintings. Figures with distended abdomens have already been noticed amongst some of the paintings of dancing. In **Pls.9.1 and 9.2 above**, the four central figures in a file of male dancers, painted as sable antelope, have a pronounced symmetrical spherical swelling of the upper body with a lot of thin lines flowing down from it. The same swelling is shown on at least one similar male dancer above them and another below them and on a monochrome figure, above left, not part of the main group of dancers. All have painted body decorations which pass over the swellings without interruption, showing that the swellings are certainly an integral part of the body and not something attached to it.

Among the group of women dancers holding short dancing sticks and with combs and leaves on their arms and shoulders, **Fig.9.29 above**, at least half have a swelling of the front of their bodies - which is shown in profile, well above the waist and much too high to represent the womb - from which lines emerge. One is at first inclined to read these as collecting bags and the lines as the tassels on the bags, but they are not on their backs where bags are normally carried nor is there any indication of the handles or straps from which bags are slung. The whole weight of the detail of the imagery indicates that these women are dancers, that their attributes correspond to those of the archetypal distended figures and that the mid-body swellings correspond to the distended abdomens of the archetype.

This forces a reexamination of many figures of women who

appear to have 'large, tasselled collecting bags' across the middle of their torsoes. In some instances, like the solitary woman of **Fig.13.2 below**, they do indeed carry such bags for the straps of two bags, one in front and one behind, are clearly indicated leading to her shoulders and there is nothing to indicate she is more than a gatherer. In many more cases, the swellings are ambiguous but more likely to represent distended abdomens.

Male figures

There are also paintings of distended male figures painted singly or in pairs, some very similar to their female counterparts, and others employing a somewhat different but closely related iconography. **Fig.11.15** depicts a man: a small, simple figure with the characteristic grossly swollen abdomen and equally characteristic viewpoint and stance, legs apart. His head, turned sideways to show the mane behind, has two large tufts on the top. He has a fly whisk on each of his shoulders, apparently tied to him to judge by the two short lines, straps or thongs, beneath each one: an exclusively male attribute. His penis is barred with a tufted line extending from one end of the bar. His arms are not raised and he has nothing in his hands.

Fig.11.16 illustrates two large figures. The largest, almost certainly male, holds combs up in each raised hand. He is not shown entirely from the front or with his legs bent and apart but walking upright. His entire chest and abdomen are swollen to enormous proportions. Beside him is a smaller partner with the same proportions, whose tufted penis puts his sex beyond doubt. He adopts the same stance, has a similar swollen body and has a comb attached to one arm. He holds nothing and his arms are lowered.

General characteristics of the figures

The imagery follows, as always, strict rules to fulfill a number of complex requirements. Most unusually, the body is painted entirely facing the viewer, to give emphasis to an enormously swollen or distended abdomen. The abdomen swells symmetrically and is spherical or becomes progressively bigger towards the base, giving the whole torso a pear shape.

It cannot represent the womb of a pregnant woman. The first and in itself conclusive fact is that some of the characteristic figures are indubitably male. Secondly, as the art was seldom concerned with illustrating transient or temporary conditions, it is inherently improbable that pregnancy would be a major theme of the art. Thirdly, the womb of a pregnant woman is firmer, higher and of a quite different shape to these distended lower abdomens: such consistently inaccurate observation and misrepresentation of reality cannot have been a major characteristic of a major image. Fourthly, when one is working from outline alone, a pregnant woman's womb is most visible when seen from the side but scarcely breaks the normal body outline when seen from the front. Following the conventions of the art, it would therefore be depicted in side view (c.f. **Fig.8.36** above).

The unique choice of a frontal view was adopted to emphasise the nature of the swelling - to show that it extended right round and across the body, affecting much more of the body than the womb. The area of swelling corresponds precisely to the gebesi: the whole lower abdomen - the part of the body which the Kung believe is the seat of potency and where it 'boils', 'swells' and expands and from which it 'bursts like a ripe pod' during trance.[14] If there are other references, one can recall the confusion in some of the lesser figures of this type between whether the swellings represented a swollen gebesi or a gatherer's collecting bag. The artists may have been aware of these ambiguities and perhaps intended them, seeing the swelling of the body as the filling of an empty receptacle with an essential life-sustaining element: just as the collecting bag was filled with food, this part of the body was filled not with food but a more powerful and potent and otherwise invisible inner force. The art consistently appropriates the ordinary to the supernatural, transforming the one to the other, each pervading the other, a unity that only in our minds creates ambiguity, confusion and misunderstanding.

The head, usually with the conventional bossed forehead and square muzzle is also turned sideways, to show the muzzle

and a 'mane' of parallel straight lines falling down the back of the head. 'Tufts' were often painted across the top of the head. As we shall see in Chapter 14, the mane of lines down the back of the head occurs widely and, other than in these figures, is an exclusively male emblem, especially associated with hunters.

The figures are often decorated with white dots and lines in great profusion which seem to represent necklaces, girdles, bangles and anklets. Thicker vertical stripes of white paint on a few of the figures can be taken to denote painted body decoration. Many of the figures are also outlined in white. We have already seen that such elaborate adornment usually denotes dancing.

Many hold leaf or comb shapes in their hands. Leaves and combs are also attached to the upper arms; often the ends of the straps that bind them are shown hanging down. We have explored how leaves and combs are also held by and attached to the arms and shoulders of figures we have interpreted as dancers but only on these distended figures are they painted with such emphasis, precision and detail; and nowhere else is such a full array of them so consistently attached to a person. In all other paintings but these, the comb is held by or attached to men. As we shall see in Chapter 14, the leaf is also otherwise an exclusively male emblem. Thus, while these figures seem very superficially to exemplify female qualities to an exaggerated degree, most of their attributes are otherwise exclusively male, rendering their gender more male than female.

The discs and whisks of dancers are never found with distended figures, while a new device, a large, simple, slightly curved crescent shape, thickened at the centre and pointed at least one end and which may be a variation of the leaf shape, only appears in their hands, becoming a distinguishing emblem of them alone, almost their 'badge of office'.

The arms are bent and raised in what is already established as a gesture associated with dancing. The attitude with legs bent and apart somewhat resembles a

squatting position sometimes adopted for copulation or childbirth, but these figures are standing with bent legs rather than squatting. The posture seem rather to have been a graphic device to reveal and focus attention on the genital area, the point from which the most important emissions associated with these images occur. It also enabled the artists to show the female sexual organs, the only time they are exposed and represented in the art. However, if this resemblance is not fortuitous and their posture is indeed in some sense intended to denote childbirth, it is still a metaphoric birth from the whole lower abdomen not a natural birth of a child from the womb.

The lines

If the swelling represents the gebesi boiling with potency, the lines represent its release. They originate in the abdominal region and, as the details of some figures show quite clearly, emerge from the genitals. The figures usually occur in pairs and, where this is the case, invariably only one of the figures has such an emission, although in every other detail the two figures are almost identical. Thus perhaps ideally two partners were required to join together to produce whatever is represented by the lines though only one makes it manifest. It is important to note that where there are pairs of figures they are always of the same sex and not, as one would expect if the lines had anything to do with natural pregnancy or childbirth, of both sexes.

The release of potency is, ideally, careful and controlled and this is reproduced in the very carefully painted lines, up to three thin parallel lines in regular zig-zag or curved, undulating patterns, sometimes in several colours. The care with which the complexities of their forms were delineated shows that they were clearly considered particularly significant: they stand in clear and deliberate contrast to the rudimentary lines or amorphous shapes of most other bodily emanations such as blood or sweat.

The lines again do not have an exclusively female origin nor do they emerge only from distended figures but from male trancers as well. They represent a great deal more than the

emission of any fluid. It looks improbable that they carry any reference to fluid at all. We have already encountered them in **Fig.10.4 above**, where they rise from a recumbent trancer. This close and causal relationship with an established archetype of a trancer confirms that they refer directly to potency without any intervening references to female bodily fluids. This is suggested in the figures that carry what look like long sticks which seem to correspond to the lines. It is demonstrated more clearly in **Figs.11.7 and 10.4 above**, where the angles of each turn in the lines are given a small clear hook or sharp thin triangular spike.[15] More than this, the line in **Fig.10.4 above** turns into a serpent with an antelope's head. Further suggestive evidence can be found in **Fig.11.9** where the lines diverge to encircle and entrap earlier figures.

These lines can extend across the painted panels for a considerable distance and were so distinctive that they were legible images in their own right. In **Fig.1.1 above**, three parallel white lines of this sort have their origin not in a human figure but a small, simple, white blob set among a series of oval designs along the bottom of the panel and zig-zag for a long way across a densely painted section of cave wall, disappearing under a large bovid superimposed on them but reappearing behind it. Thus the lines, with their very particular form and character, need have no figures on them and their progenitor could be reduced to a shapeless disc without them losing their visual effectiveness for their original audience.

Other figures with linear emanations

Lines, many of them long zig-zags, emerge not only from the abdomen or genital area but from the heads, bodies and limbs of many other figures in the paintings, without the distorted bodies of the distended figures. Some figures hold similar lines. The figures in **Fig.11.17** are all male and all have very elongated bodies and very thin, fleshless limbs. Two have small hunting bags high on their backs though none of them have any weapons. Two have stiff tufts or aprons at their waists. The five standing figures hold their arms

straight and rigidly down in front of their bodies or wave them wildly. Three are sitting or squatting and three are seen from above, sprawled on their backs, gesticulating wildly, their arms flung wide and with their legs tightly bent and apart: a much more abandoned posture than a trancer's, and one not unlike those of the distended figures. There is a sense of exhaustion suggesting the aftermath or throes of trancing, the draining of potency, a sense that they are incorporeal remnants following the loss of all energy. These are not accidental distortions in the sketch of an incompetent painter: the vivid, if strange, exaggerated, contorted, wild and abandoned gestures and postures are so deliberately and carefully contrived and depicted with such conviction that they are evidence enough of the skill of the artist. In the midst of these figures are two creatures, one with a head at each end of its body, the other formless, with long claws and perhaps standing on its hind legs and with a bird's plumage. They compound the strangeness of the whole scene, induced by the absence of any accoutrements and the lack of cohesion and variety of the stances of the figures. By removing the figures from the world of reality, the artist intended to communicate something beyond the mundane. At least six of the eleven main figures have zig-zag lines. These come from the faces of two and the chests of two others; one holds his in his hands but it may originally have joined his face; the last line is probably also held. Of the two with lines from their faces, one holds a bird and the other a crescent; the latter wears aprons as well. Another, with a line from the chest, also holds a bird.

In **Fig.13.2 below** a one-legged and one-armed figure also holds a very similar line; so does a figure in **Fig.15.24 below**; and also a hunter amongst a group in a similar state of sprawled collapse in **Fig.9.34 above.**[16] Smaller and straighter lines come from the abdomens of one of the two fighting women in **Fig.8.26 above**; the leader of three women in the centre of a panel with several recumbent trancers, **Fig.10.5 above**, while the middle one holds a similar line and

the woman at the rear holds her head with both hands. The same lines come from the line of kneeling dancers with whisks on their shoulders in **Fig.14.9 below**, who seem to hold the sites of their emanations with both hands. Lines can also be seen coming from the leading figure of the dancers at the top of **Fig.15.21 below**. Two women dancing in **Fig.9.23 above** have many lines coming from both sides of their chests but it is difficult to be certain that these may not represent some form of tasselled dance apparel.

Lines can come from the tops of the bags on some gatherers' backs, as in the two gatherers of **Fig.8.15 above** and one of the gatherers in **Fig.10.3 above**, members of groups that have already been noted for bodily emanations. One of the hunters of the zebra in **Fig.12.28 below** also has a line coming from his hunting bag. Finally, a hunter of an elephant in **Fig.12.4 below** has a line emerging from his head.[17]

The figures on the lines

Small, rudimentary figures hold onto the lines that emerge from the genital area of the distended figures. They are not babies or children but fully adult in their proportions but they are also curiously formless and 'other-worldly', stiff, static, sexless, malformed and incomplete. Most crouch and kneel animal-like on all fours and cling onto the lines but often their legs float free and above the lines, showing that in some cases they are not actually moving along them. In **Fig.10.4 above**, some seem to hang suspended from the lines as if about to fall from them. Some of the most detailed of these figures are shown in **Fig.12.18**. They are much more carefully drawn than most but are still sexless and their incompleteness is apparent for they have only one arm and one leg. They scarcely grip or move along the line and one floats entirely above it. All had long manes of white hair. Three turn their heads backwards in a unique, completely impossible and unnatural position and point their single white tusks upwards: we shall see in Chapter 14 that tusks are an unambiguous emblem of transformation. Their upper and lower arms are encircled with white bangles. Nearby, two

'complete' versions of the same figures walk away from the scene, fully human and invested with emblems of tusks; triangles, manes and tufts on their heads; and combs and leaves on their shoulders and in their hands.[18] In **Fig.11.3**, the malformed figure crawling down the line appears to bleed from its muzzle, a strong indicator of its association with trance.

The distended figures do not generate or 'give birth' to these small creatures. In **Fig.10.4 above** three of these figures already full-formed, are clearly crawling towards the bottom of the line to follow several of their partners who begin to ascend it; they certainly do not emerge from the trancer or from the lines. Once on the lines, they face and move both towards and away from the distended figures. We shall later find the same small creatures attached to lines formed by flecks that have their ultimate origin in elaborate designs based on oval shapes e.g. in **Fig.15.23 below.**

If they cannot be said to be generated or created by the distended figures, they are in some way under their influence or control and undergoing some form of transformation through their association with the potency released by the distended figures. The details all suggest that they are attracted and affected by a potency inherent in the lines themselves rather than originating in the figures from which the lines emerge. The sense that the lines may capture and control semi-human people may be expressed in **Fig.11.9**, a painting of a women whose lines curl round, encircle and seem to entrap earlier paintings of semi-human figures. The particular powers of the distended figures work most closely on these semi-human or spirit creatures than on animals or plants.

Conclusion

In any attempt at interpretation, the distended figures must be set in the context of the paintings as a whole. When this is done, they cease to be the strange and isolated images they appear to be at first sight and it becomes clear that they have a wide range of correspondences with other sets of images. Through their gesture, adornment and the combs and leaves that they hold or have tied to their arms or

shoulders, they can be associated with dancing. Swollen abdomens are also found in lines and groups of dancers, both male and female. Some dancers also emit lines directly from these swellings, if not from between their legs. Lines, though they lack the size and complexity of these of the more complex distended figures, also emerge from various parts of other figures, many of whom have indications that they are associated with trance. At least one comparably complex and closely similar set of lines to those generated by the distended figures rises from a male trancer. The figures attached to the lines, twisted, malformed or incomplete, may bleed from their noses and thus be recognized as suffering a distinctive symptom of trance. Several have 'tusks', curved lines protruding from their faces; so do several of the distended figures themselves. This, as we shall see, is an emblem closely associated not only with the elephant - the most powerful symbol of trance potency and source of transforming powers.

These distended figures, the figures on the lines and figures entangled by them frequently have heads with large antelope ears, in some cases recognizable as an kudu's, and long, sharp, pointed muzzles.[19] In Chapter 13, creatures with these features will be shown to be a recurrent and distinctive image which may possibly be associated with the spirits of the dead, the Kung gauwasi. Many San groups believe such spirits have only a tenuous grip on life, which has to be constantly sustained by the gods that brought them into existence and whom they serve.[20] Such qualities of ethereal fragility and incorporeality are powerfully suggested in the long, thin figures with swaying tentative movements of **Fig.11.9**. The Kung believe such spirits are so dependent on the gods that they remain tied to them by actual long thin strings.[21] This may then offer in part an interpretation of the complex lines in these images: a lifeline connecting spirits with their sustaining creator. If this is the case, the distended figures become representations of gods. This cannot yet be convincingly demonstrated, beyond showing that these figures are the most

powerful images of sources of potency in the paintings, and of a potency of particularly strong and transforming power, and that they have a multiplicity of qualities signified by the multiplicity of their attributes. There is one further suggestive correspondence: Many different San groups believe that there are two great gods, one of whom is the creator.[22] These figures also ideally occur in pairs, only one of whom generates lines. However, in all recorded San beliefs, the gods are male. To see these figures as goddesses is thus, after all, not an entirely remote possibility. But it is at present a final and uncertain step, to be approached only after careful preparation of the path by demonstrable associations of the images with dancing, potency and transformation.

The most striking feature of these images remains what seems to be the general, if not exclusive, emphasis on their femininity. But in the end, it seems that the gender of these figures is not their essential element. They are not, to repeat and emphasise once more, exclusively female. Their attributes, so many of which are male, do not so much confuse the issue as ensure that the imagery transcends designations of gender. Only because their generative powers were in part conceptualised as bringing them within the feminine realm, does this confusion arise. In the end, through the range of their attributes, these figures become in a sense androgynous. This may be one of the sources of their power.[23] It may have drawn its power as a symbol in part from its combination of qualities conceived as distinctively male and female.[24]

NOTES

1. I am not satisfied that the very few figures in South Africa that have been compared to these Zimbabwe figures are in fact related: the many differences seem very much greater than the few very superficial resemblances: see Solomon, 1991: Fig.7; Vinnicombe, 1976: Fig.87; the "hallucinatory figure" of Lewis-Williams and Dowson, 1989: Fig.84c.

2. Frobenius, 1931b: 21-22.

3. Goodall, 1949; 1959: 93, Pls.51, 52; 1962.

4. Goodall, 1959: 93.

5. Cooke, 1965a.

6. Huffman, 1983: 51-52.

7. See Goodall, 1962: Fig.3.

8. Goodall, 1962: Fig.3.

9. The complete set of figures is sketched in Goodall, 1962: Fig.4.

10. Goodall, 1959: Pl.51.

11. Breuil, 1966: 119, wondered at first "if it might have been a bear imported from India by migrating gypsies" but decided finally that it was a "Cape ratel".

12. Frobenius, 1931b: Figs.12 and 16, from the Chivhu and Marondera Districts, show such figures holding a staff in each hand. Figs.13 and 14, from the Marondera District, have only one staff; all but Fig.16 have lines coming from between their legs; in Fig.13, there are four carefully drawn parallel lines with spikes protruding from the outer angles. The precise locations of these paintings were not recorded and they have not been found again.

13. There is a sufficiently strong and sustained similarity between the unusual postures and shapes of the distended figures and the equally unusual way that the crocodile is generally depicted in the art (e.g. **Fig.7.19 above**) to suggest that the crocodile was in some sense an animal equivalent of the distended figures, that some correspondences existed in the artists' conceptions of distended humans and crocodiles. These creatures are not the narrow, streamlined, elongated, aggressive and predatory threat in a pool or river that the crocodile suggests to us today. Uniquely among animals, they are shown not in profile but from the underside so that the stomach faces towards the viewer, just as the human figures are unique in also being shown frontally to give full emphasis to their swollen abdomens. The stomachs of the crocodiles are often equally gross and distended, round and sagging. Their limbs are also in the same positions, bent and away from the body. The crocodile's tail, extending down from between the back legs, echoes the lines that emanate from between the legs of some of the swollen human figures. The crocodile thus shares many of the strange elements that distinguish this particular form of human. This correspondence is strengthened by a painting showing a crocodile wearing the same white necklaces, bangles and, particularly, girdles, that are a particular feature of the swollen humans: **Fig.7.19 above.** Reasons for this possible conceptual equivalence may lie in two of the most striking and obvious natural characteristics of the crocodile: the fierce and brave maternal instinct, unique

among reptiles, with which it protects its nest and eggs and the number of progeny it produces, all of them already at hatching miniature adults. These may have made it an epitome of a sustaining maternal potency.

14. Katz, 1982: 41, 44, 93-5.

15. Very similar spikes are painted on the elbows and knees and perhaps on one shoulder of the figure in **Fig.8.13 above.** So far, this is a unique occurrence and the figure has no context that would help explain these motifs.

16. Goodall noticed one similar figure and captioned it "Man handling snakes": 1959: Fig.13.

17. This is taken as an indicator of the spirit leaving the body in South African trance scenes: Lewis-Williams and Dowson, 1989: 74-5.

18. Goodall, 1962: Fig.5.

19. These are the features of the images on which Frobenius focussed: Frobenius, 1931b: 21-2, Figs.12-16.

20. Marshall, 1962: 241-4.

21. Marshall, 1962: 242.

22. See Marshall, 1962, and Katz, 1982: 29-31, on the two Kung gods; Bleek, 1935, Lewis-Williams, 1981a: 117-26, and Hewitt, 1976 and 1986, on the Xam gods; Silberbauer, 1965: 95-7, and 1981, 51-7, on the Gwi gods; and Guenther, 1986: 218-225, on the Nharo gods.

23. In this, if in few other ways, they are comparable to the Drakensberg paintings of the eland, which has been established as the key symbol of that region: Lewis-Williams, 1981a: 48, 50.

24. These images have formed the basic graphic illustration for Solomon's (1991) discussion of gender in the paintings of southern Africa. This argues that "Gender is a sociological category... which is in no way entailed by biological sex... Gender organisation was the most marked division in San societies... There is evidence of the creative use of metaphor... in the gendering of cultural texts including art... Many themes and motifs in the art appear to be gender linked." As in so many recent South African studies of the paintings, the emphasis is on analysis of ethnographic texts at the expense of the iconography. There is no indication of any knowledge of the range of the imagery and no comparative study of it. Interpretation of the images is cursory and asserts more than it demonstrates. Thus, there is no consideration of the many and characteristic attributes attached to these figures, most of which are otherwise exclusively masculine: the combs, leaves and mane. Only the

long lines which some of these figures hold upright in their hands can be considered to have feminine connotations - if they are interpreted as digging sticks. The posture is not the full squatting, legs-apart posture to which a sexual connotation can be rightfully attributed.

12. HUNTING OR TRANCING? [1]

The hunt

Given the place that hunting occupied in Later Stone Age and San life and the pervasive imagery of the hunter in the art, one would expect that, if the art was intended to illustrate everyday incidents, or to recall and enjoy in retrospect the ordinary pleasures of life, or to record memorable events, or as an aid in teaching children, it would include a great many scenes of hunting the most favoured game animals.[2] The opposite is the case. The few apparent hunting scenes almost all depict what seem at first to be the hunting of very large and dangerous beasts, invented creatures or men. Such activities would certainly have been far from normal hunting practices. This is a problem that must be addressed.[3]

Five paintings are known of elephant being attacked by hunters. In **Fig.12.1** a wounded elephant is surrounded by 15 hunters. Four or five aim arrows at it; six flee from it and one is lying, crouched and face down under its belly, his arrows beside him. None have hunting bags and they are not using the simple arrows shown in most paintings but ones that have instead a large triangular head. The elephant stands, head slightly lowered, pierced by a great many arrows in its rump, belly, neck, legs and trunk. Flows of dots show that it bleeds profusely from its wounds and internally, as the dots flowing from its trunk indicate.

In **Fig.12.2** the faint outline of a very large elephant has four hunters just in front of its trunk, two of them aiming arrows at it. One crouches as he aims, in a characteristic position of a San hunter as he releases his arrow. Two hunters flee from the encounter. Just behind the elephant are five more hunters, three of them running towards the animal and one aiming an arrow at it. Again the arrows being used are unusual, with barbed or bifurcated tips. Again the elephant stands inert, accepting its fate, pierced by many arrows and bleeding from its trunk. The scale of elephant to hunters is entirely removed from reality and the ways that they are painted are very different.[4]

Fig.12.3 shows an elephant being shot at by four hunters standing in front of it. A fifth hunter lies on his back under it but still also aims an arrow at it. There is nothing unusual visible in their arrows. The elephant stands erect and at bay, its head and tail and possibly one leg raised in agitation, its trunk pierced and possibly bleeding. Again the scale is unreal: the elephant is disproportionately large in comparison to its hunters.

In **Fig.12.4** there are two adjacent scenes of elephants being hunted. In the lower, the elephant is being attacked by nine hunters: three approach it from the front, three from the rear and three are beneath it. One man appears unarmed though his weapons may lie beneath the elephant's forelegs. Five carry bows and arrows; two, on the left, seem to have quivers across their backs; two carry fly whisks; none have bags; and two seem to carry sticks. The elephant is not pierced by arrows but large blobs of paint round its underside may represent blood.[5]

The second elephant stands still as three hunters run towards it, two armed with bows and arrows. The third aims an extremely long staff at the animal's forehead and also carries a short club or axe with a heavy head. A fourth hunter flees from immediately in front of the beast, his head turned to look towards the danger. A fifth figure stands still and erect, waving a fly whisk above his head and holding a long staff with a triangular head and two arrows with similar heads in the other hand though he has no bow.

The scene in **Fig.12.5**, part of the panel of **Fig.1.2 above**, is painted entirely in white and so is poorly preserved and fragmentary, but its main forms are clear. On the right are the remains of an elephant, disproportionately large compared with the figures hunting it. The one clear figure is of a hunter crouched under the animal's belly and thrusting a spear, with a large triangular head and barbs, at the animal's hind legs, slightly suggestive of hamstringing though he aims at the front of a leg and not at the vulnerable tendon at the back. A line of seven hunters approaches the animal from behind. The leading hunter raises

a spear above his head and prepares to throw it; it has a large head but the shape of this is no longer clear. However, the two spears that the two hunters immediately behind him each carry have the same heads as the spearhead of the hunter below the animal. The hunters further behind carry bows but two spears with elaborate heads stand upright in front of them. There are the remains of a second elephant by the same artist behind the hunters.

In the single known unambiguous scene of a rhinoceros kill, **Fig.12.6**, the animal is not bleeding or collapsing but has two arrows in its chest. One hunter aims an arrow with a forked tip at it and another is about to plunge a spear into its belly.

Two panels depict particularly large, animated, dramatic and detailed groups of hunters. In **Fig.12.7** at least 30 hunters surround the outline of a large animal, painted before the hunters. Its forequarters and head have been destroyed by rainwash, which probably also destroyed several more hunters. To judge from the surviving outline, the animal was certainly a hippo or rhino and most probably the latter. The hunters are highly accomplished paintings and show an extraordinary concentration on the anatomy of the hunters' bodies. Round discs on the upper arms seem to emphasise knotted muscles. Elongations of the knees and ankles seem to expose and emphasise bone structure. Narrow unpainted lines running up the fronts of the long curved torsoes of many of them draws attention to the 'inner channels' of the body if not the spine. The buttocks and, most unusually, the navel, are also carefully delineated. The variety and energy of the hunters' movements are vividly expressed. They scarcely form a concerted attacking group: some are still preparing their weapons, bending over their arrows, others are sitting or crouching, some stand and seem to converse, some face the beast and others turn away, some run towards it, waving their bows; only two at most seem about to shoot it. Some of their arrows have heads that are forked or have barbs forming a St. Andrew's cross.

In **Figs.12.8** and **12.9**, two groups of hunters are also

engaged in energetic cooperative activity. One group of 36 faces right, **Fig.12.8**, and, across a large gap to the right of this group, where the paint has been weathered away, another of eight men faces them, **Fig.12.9.** The line of arrows on their left seem to be sticking to something that has not been preserved (c.f. **Fig.12.17**). Rather as in **Fig.12.2**, the two groups seem to be hunting a single very large animal whose outline once occupied the gap between the groups. Of those on the left, at least 25 form part of a single composition by the same artist. Four of these are engaged in active attack and seven flee the scene. Many of the figures have roundels on their upper arms, like those in **Fig.12.7.** Similar roundels are placed over their penises. Several also have strange hoops curving from neck to shoulder. Where the arrows are detailed, they have heavy forked, crossed and triangular ends. Three of the largest figures carry long staffs with similar tips. Another nine figures have been added to the composition by later artists. They share many of the features and motifs of the original figures and emphasise the points made by the original artist.

In **Fig.12.10** a buffalo has three armed hunters running towards it from behind. Two hunters wearing the tails associated with dancing stand beneath it, one holding an arrow with a large triangular head. In **Fig.12.11** a man holds a spear with an elaborate tip horizontally and prepares to plunge it into a dying buffalo with legs weakened, back arched and head lowered.[6]

Other creatures shown being hunted or killed do not belong to the animal world as we know it. In **Fig.12.12** an unidentifiable creature with heavy body, head and neck, hoofed, hornless and earless, is pierced by four arrows. Eight hunters approach it, one of whom aims an arrow with a forked tip at its nose. Another holds arrows with the same heads. The arrows of the remaining hunters have no distinct tips.[7]

On a single panel, **Fig.12.13**, there are at least three separate small hunting scenes. On the left, a hunter prepares to lunge a spear with a forked end, what look like

several barbs at right angles to the shaft and a set of tassels beneath them, into the lowered head of a creature standing still, legs extended and inert, accepting its fate or already dying. Behind it, a hunter aims an arrow with an identical tip to the spear. The creature has the shape of an antelope but is hornless and has rounded ears and a long tail with a forked end: it conforms to no recognizable species. In the centre, another unrecognizable and invented creature with long round ears, short curved muzzle, clawed paws and a long thin tail has an arrow in its chest and again seems to have a lowered head and extended legs. A hunter in front of it aims an arrow with a long cross-bar as its tip towards it. Behind him are his hunting bag and further arrows of the same type. Below this, a hunter shoots an arrow with a similar tip at the rear of an unidentifiable animal with lowered head and extended legs. Its legs all come to points and the lower parts of the back legs are extraordinarily thin. To the left of these scenes, **Pl.12.1**, a pair of hunters carry bundles of arrows and hunting bags filled with more arrows. One of them aims an arrow with a triangular head towards one of a pair of antelope with the horns of duiker, although they are disproportionately large for this species. Both hunters wear tails; lines also emerge from their chests and from the upper parts of the arms holding the arrows. Further to the left of them, another hunter aims a pair of barbed and tasselled arrows though his prey is not shown. Just below him, these scenes are imitated in a crude way with another hunter standing in front of a small unidentifiable antelope and shooting an arrow with a bar across the tip at its nose.

There is a final category of hunting: that of men by men. **Fig.12.14** shows a man fallen on his back and shot with an inordinate number of arrows. A set of hunting equipment that, to judge by its scale, belongs to him lies at the top of the scene. Three much smaller hunters aim more arrows at him. Two have large triangular heads and the third head is forked top and bottom, a variation on the arrowheads with crossed barbs; the arrows in the small hunters' hands do not have any such heads to them. A fourth small figure raises a

club or axe with a heavy head at the fallen hunter. A second large figure lies on his back beside the first but he is entirely unharmed and has not got a single arrow in or near him.

This is clearly not simply a scene of a killing. The relative sizes of the killers and their victim, the numbers of arrows in his body, the sharp contrast between the arrows aimed at the victim and those still held in the hunters' hands and the contrast between the two large figures remove the scene from reality. Several other scenes of men lying prone and with an inordinate number of arrows sticking out of every part of their bodies have been recorded but they are all much smaller (e.g. **Fig.12.15**). Only one, **Fig.12.16**, shows the assailant: a figure so distorted and transformed it becomes grotesque, fleshless, with a huge, horned animal head, large knees, large toed feet and a tiny trunk.[8]

Large animals wounded or bleeding

Paintings of wounded animals are almost as unusual as scenes of hunting and there is again an overwhelming emphasis on the same beasts. There are many paintings of elephants pierced by a great many arrows and some where the beast is shown upside down with limp and crumpled legs in the air.[9] The superpositions of **Fig.12.17** are difficult to disentangle but include parts of three elephants: the fragmentary outline of a very large one, a smaller one painted over both it and the trunk and tusk roots of another. A line of a large number of arrows have been painted over all three, apparently sticking in the forequarters of the largest of them.

A small rhino with three arrows in its loins has been drawn below the large animal surrounded by hunters of **Fig.12.7**. As so commonly happens, it seems to be have been added to the composition by a later artist as a simplified reiteration of the main composition to clarify and emphasise its essence. Perhaps in the same sense, the outline of a very large rhino with many arrows in its undersides, **Fig.6.3 above**, was painted beside the buffalo hunt of **Fig.12.10**. If the sizes of the arrows in it are compared with the size of this beast, its awe-inspiring proportions become apparent.

This is no longer a rhinoceros but a creature with a rhinoceros form but of fearful magnitude. Another wounded rhino, **Fig.12.18**, in the midst of dance scenes of which **Fig.9.32 above** is a part, has arrows, all with asymmetrical hooped flights, in its shoulder, rump, belly and chest. One of the many rhino in **Fig.1.4 above** has arrows in its neck, belly, withers and back leg. Unlike most wounded elephants, wounded rhino seem never to have been shown bleeding from internal haemorrhaging. An exception might be the creature in **Fig.12.19**, either a rhino or a warthog, which has arrows in its chest and bleeds profusely from its muzzle.

Interpretation

The paintings of hunted and wounded animals follow a pattern. Where the paintings represent identifiable animals, they are nearly all large powerful and dangerous beasts: elephant, rhino and buffalo. On the simplest level, the paintings represent very desirable prey for these animals are all sources of large quantities of highly palatable meat, rich in fat. On the other hand, they also represent the most difficult animals to kill especially if you have no heavy metal weapons. Rhino are comparatively easy to approach and then kill with a heavy metal spear but not with anything lighter. Elephant are said traditionally to have been possible to kill only in pit falls or if they were approached at close quarters and then hamstrung by severing the Achilles tendon with blows from a heavy metal axe or speared from trees above the paths they frequented, using a heavy metal spear.[10] The Later Stone Age hunters of Zimbabwe did not possess any metal weapons. Hunting these animals successfully with bows and arrows, if it were possible at all and this seems extremely doubtful, would have been a remarkable and rare achievement.[11]

The sense of unreality is heightened by the arrows that are shown being used in the paintings. In almost every case, they have what seem remarkably large and heavy yet fragile, unwieldy and inefficient heads, made with what look like large triangles, long thin forked or crossed tips and sets of long multiple barbs. It is impossible to envisage what

material available in the Later Stone Age could have been used to make these or how they could have been shot any distance or with sufficient velocity to pierce a tough hide, let alone disable a large beast or penetrate so deep to cause it to haemorrhage internally as several of the elephants are clearly doing. The design of the arrows is as perverse and improbable as the act of hunting such creatures. Death appears to occur from multiple wounds and internal bleeding, not from poison, and the numbers of arrows used generally seems quite inordinate. None of this accords with any known Stone Age or San practices.[12]

The paintings of these hunts are thus, in one sense, a way of imagining the impossible and thinking the unthinkable. If the hunting paintings, even those representing the hunting of recognizable animals, are not representations of reality, they must denote something else. With this established, we can recognise several specific indications to suggest that they are concerned with trancing and potency. Several of these scenes are juxtaposed with illustrations of some of the visible manifestations of trance. The panel with the series of small hunting scenes, **Fig.12.13**, also contains a scene in which a man bends over a crouched figure and touches him in the small of the back with both hands, **Fig.10.7 above:** the characteristic postures of a trancer curing a patient. Both figures have long lines falling from their muzzles which strongly suggest that both figures are bleeding from their noses: a common symptom of trance. Above the curing scene and the adjacent hunting scene a winged creature hovers, with a human body and a single human leg and with wings with long feathers in place of arms. We shall show in Chapter 13 that illustrations of the transformation of people into birds are a recurrent feature in the paintings.

In describing trance, the Kung say that trance potency is inserted into the body by master trancers shooting invisible 'arrows of potency', num tchisi, into the novice trancer's body in the area of the abdomen "which are felt as painful thorns and needles". Whether he has been shot thus or not, as a trancer enters trance he feels similar

sensations in the same area as his potency becomes active.[13] There seem to be good reasons to suppose that the completely unrealistic arrows with elaborate tips that are a feature of the hunting scenes are 'arrows of potency'.

Significant support for this can be found in the complete absence of such arrows in any scene concerned with the more ordinary aspects of life: in scenes, for instance, of camps or families. In contrast, as the argument would suggest, they are found in many scenes of dancing e.g. they are carried by the two hunters in **Fig.7.14 above**, who are painted by the same artist and beside the dancers of **Fig.9.32 above**, one of whom also carries one of these arrows; by the hunters beside the dancers in **Fig.9.14 above**, and by several of the line of dancers in **Fig.9.15 above.** There are also paintings of men holding 'arrows of potency' in isolation or whose contexts are otherwise unclear e.g. **Fig.12.20**, the hunters in **Figs.8.1 and 8.3 above**, and some in the lines of hunters in **Fig.8.5 above.**

While spears are never shown among an ordinary hunter's equipment, many of the hunters in the paintings illustrated so far in this chapter have not only 'arrows of potency' but spears. The heads of most of these spears are as elaborate and impractical and have very much the same forms as arrows of potency, and in some cases clearly identical to them. In **Fig.12.4**, a hunter is about to throw the simplest of spears, without any elaboration of the tip, at the top elephant. A man standing still beside him holds a long staff with a triangular head like those of the two 'arrows of potency' which he also carries. In **Fig.12.5** the four hunters nearest their victim all have spears as their only weapons and at least one is clearly aiming his at the animal. Their heads are identical to the most characteristic form of 'arrows of potency'. In **Fig.12.6** a hunter plunges a spear with what we would consider a very conventional leaf-shaped tip into the rhino. In **Fig.12.8** two men are armed only with long staffs or spears with the forked, triangular and barbed heads of arrows and attract particular attention for they are among the largest figures and their stillness contrasts with the

movement of those around them. In **Fig.12.13** a hunter thrusts a spear with the same multiple barbs as the arrow of his partner at a creature. There are also a very few instances of isolated figures holding spears: in **Fig.12.21** three figures wearing aprons or the tails of a male dancer hold spears upright in front of them with heads like a conventional arrow above a swelling in the top of the shaft. In **Fig.12.22** the head is a triangle made up of three lines above barbs that point forward. That it has symbolic value, is in some sense an emblem, is perhaps supported by the strange, semi-human figure beside it who also holds a strange object, possibly a plant or rattle. Though there is no ethnographic support, the iconography of these paintings strongly suggests that all 'spears' may have had the same significance as the elaborate arrows and thus also served as 'spears of potency'.

The repeated use of scenes of impossible hunts and kills, of animals pierced by arrows, bleeding, collapsing, dying and dead to connote trancing is established through detailed consideration of the iconography of these images and in several different ways: by demonstrating the highly selective choice of the types of hunting that were illustrated; by establishing the highly improbable, dangerous, unnatural and fearful nature of the particular forms of hunting; by recognising the unreal sorts of weapons used; by the associations of these scenes with scenes illustrating activities associated with trance more directly; and by their associations with transformed human figures.

If this is the case, many of the important features of the main hunting scenes can be interpreted with new understanding. If these are 'arrows' and 'spears of potency', it follows that the hunters who shoot them therefore must be experienced trancers inducing trance. It would then follow that the large animals pierced by these arrows represent a person about to enter trance. The collapse of the animals would then be a metaphor for entering trance and the stippling emitted by the dying animal not only blood but the release of potency activated by trance.[14]

While it must be firmly established through comparative iconographic studies, hunting dangerous animals as a metaphor or symbol of trance almost seems to have a certain elegant inevitability. There are correspondences between the two on the most profound emotional and social levels.[15] Hunting and trancing were the two most important and central experiences of a San man's life. Both are the agents of the greatest benefits to the community. Both are essentially communal and cooperative activities. Neither are entered into lightly. The intense excitements, dangers and fears of the hunt so vividly expressed in some of these paintings echo exactly the emotions associated with entering trance. The sensations experienced in hunting and trancing have many parallels. Both result in heightened exertion and physical stress. Both demand the conquest of fear and bravery in the face of the unpredictable or unknown and control near the limits of endurance. Both are encounters with death.

It could therefore be claimed that these images of hunters showing symptoms of extreme stress need not necessarily be diagnostic of trance and may have had nothing to do with it. To determine which was really being represented in paintings, one has to look not at the sensations depicted, for these are common to both, but at some of the other attributes of the hunters and the equipment they are using. Particularly in the arrowheads, we can recognise that the imagery was not concerned with the realities of hunting but with something supernatural.

Death and trancing were conceived as different aspects of the same phenomenon for the Kung.[16] In the paintings, the many close, resonant and evocative correspondences between trancing and the death of the most powerful of animals were carried from one to the other as the one became the symbol of the other. There is more than an equivalence, an equation or a substitution. There is a transcendent symmetry that created resonances that echoed through the symbolism.

The great beasts in other contexts

In Zimbabwe, the significance of the great beasts extended

beyond the association between their death and their release of potency. Their close associations with potency can be discerned in other aspects of the paintings. Like the distended figures, elephants are often shown in groups and, to judge from the shapes of their heads, female elephants far outnumber males. White, the pigment which seems to have had particular connotations of potency, was used to paint elephants more than any other subject.

Paintings of elephants may often be 2m and more across and at least one approaches life size. The original or subsequent artists often filled such huge images with a thick, clayey cream, orange or grey pigment, smeared across the surface with their hands. Frequently this pigment has disappeared, leaving only a lighter stain on the rock surface.[17] Large paintings of elephants dominate many caves, usually placed high on the walls above the numerous smaller paintings: for instance, the pale stain of a large elephant can be discerned high above the group of paintings of particularly elaborate oval designs in **Pl.15.1 below.** The large painting of hunters at rest in **Fig.8.1 above** is overlaid by the white remnants of a large elephant. On almost every hill or outcrop of boulders where there are several sets of paintings, there will be at least one huge painting of an elephant. Many of these images, quite disproportionate in size to the rest of the paintings, can be said to form the background or field, the dominating element, against which the rest of the disparate paintings in many panels are set and which they served to unite in a single visual statement.

In **Fig.1.1 above** the outline of an elephant in white has been painted over a great variety of animal and human images. The latter predominate and many of them are family scenes and some show indications of trancing. There is a large oval design under the elephant's trunk and forelegs. The elephant faces towards and is balanced by an equally large and heavy beast with bovid features: together they dominate the imagery.

The earliest painting in **Fig.12.23** was the outline of a

large buffalo, facing right, of which only the tail, feet and lines of belly and neck remain. Five adult and two young tsessebe were later painted across its body. The back and tail of the buffalo were repainted, probably more than once, in thick stripes of mustard and white pigments. In the final stages of the development of the panel the buffalo was replaced by the white outline of the large elephant, facing in the opposite direction. This superimposition is so careful and complete that the artist was clearly very aware of the image he was replacing. He thus established once again that elephant and buffalo are interchangeable. The elephant's legs have been stretched far beyond the buffalo's in a quite unnatural away, to reach and partially cover the paintings at the bottom where the rock curves away: demonstrating that an important purpose of the image was indeed to bring the whole panel into some sort of unity.

Amongst the earliest paintings in **Fig.12.24** were a set of oval shapes. As human and animal figures were added, so were more ovals. The white outline of a large elephant was then superimposed on the whole panel. It can thus be said that the elephant replaced the ovals and must therefore have related connotations. In Chapter 15, many more examples will demonstrate how elephants were particularly closely integrated with oval designs, bringing together the most powerful and pervasive symbols of potency in the art: an integration so close that the two images were frequently conflated to generate composite images of elephant-ovals (see **Figs.15.13-15 below**).

We have already established that rhinoceros were conceived as equivalents of elephants. Like elephant, they were also painted above many major friezes of paintings and large paintings of these animals, in simple or partially filled outlines, are again the central features or foci or serve as
the field, background and overall unifying element of many panels. In **Fig.12.25** the outline of a large rhino is overlain by several single hunters, many of them falling or supine, a family group and files of hunters and gatherers.

In **Fig.12.26** a rhino cow and her calf unify a composition that includes the outlines of ovals to which whisks, discs and bristles have been attached.

In **Fig.12.27** a buffalo is the background of a series of superimposed paintings whose emphasis is on different aspects of dancing. In **Pl.9.2,** the earliest painting, in the centre of the panel, was also a buffalo, though much smaller. As we have seen, there is also at least one example of the large bovine, which is the victim of the hunt in **Fig.12.12 above,** used as a similar overall unifying feature: in **Fig.1.1 above** a large orange example with massive body and delicate horns confronts the equally large elephant.

As we shall see in Chapter 13, the potency of the large beasts and particularly the elephant was an agent of transformation, turning trancers into winged creatures or releasing the trancer's spirit, enabling him to travel out of his body. In **Fig.12.23**, seven human figures in the process of transformation were attached to and above the elephant's back. The transforming figures belong as much to the elephant as they do to the buffalo. Dispersed over the elephant in **Fig.12.24** are figures undergoing a similar process. This elephant has been positioned so that the line of its back runs through the main concentration of the transforming figures so closely that one at least seems to be crawling along it.

Elephants themselves underwent transformation or, alternatively, transformed trancers took on many of the features of elephants. There are composite creatures with trunks and the heads, bodies and tails of elephants but with bristles along their backs and claws on their feet, and possibly with the legs and hooves of antelope (see **Fig.13.19 below**). There are also 'incomplete' creatures with only one fore and one hind leg, with many of the characteristics of elephants (see **Fig.10.3 above and Figs.15.13-15 below**). We shall see in Chapter 14 that many human and animal figures have miniature tusks protruding from their faces, which associates them with elephants and was a primary emblem used in the paintings to denote transformation.

The elephant, almost alone among the animal imagery, bleeds and collapses like a trancer. It is distorted and given the attributes of other animals. It acts with the same powers as the swollen figures. It replaces oval shapes. It shows distortions, omissions, loss of natural form, conflations, juxtapositions and associations with a range of attributes of dance, potency and transformation.

The hunting and death of other animals

In **Fig.12.28** a zebra has an arrow in its flank and perhaps others in its chest. It shows no sign of collapse but bleeds heavily from a wound in its chest. It is surrounded by large dots and by rectangular shapes with serrated ends. The dots may have been intended to emphasise bleeding but the significance of the rectangles is impenetrable. Three hunters run towards it from the back. Two are disproportionately smaller than it: perhaps once again an index of their relative power, importance or significance. The nearest aims an arrow at the creature and holds another with a large flight matching that of the arrow stuck in its back leg. There are also several paintings of zebra bleeding from their muzzles, though they are not shot with arrows or visibly wounded e.g. **Fig.12.29**. Another is shown in **Fig.1.4 above**: a hunter aims an arrow towards it but the two images are so far apart that their association is uncertain. It seems possible therefore that the zebra was the only ordinary game animal that was conceived as sharing in part the significance of the large beasts.

Only two paintings have been recorded which seem without doubt to represent larger game animals being shot by a hunter. In **Fig.6.5 above**, a large but poorly drawn sable has two arrows in its chest and bleeds from the wound. A proportionately tiny hunter flees: movement and emotion are seldom so vividly portrayed outside hunting scenes. In **Fig.7.1 above,** a tsessebe calf stands still, neck extended, head lowered and hind legs bent and perhaps collapsing, with an arrow in its neck. A hunter stands immediately in front of it and aims an arrow with a forked tip over its head, directly at its neck or withers.

Three very small antelope in **Fig.13.14 below** have the arched back and lowered head of a wounded animal and two of them, as well as another small animal, have three lines of blood streaming from their muzzles. The tsessebe raising its head in alarm in **Fig.12.30** may also have an arrow in its chest. Another antelope shot by an arrow is shown in **Fig.12.31:** it has clearly been killed for it is upside down, its legs are limp and bent and its neck lies extended and twisted. Beside it, one of the big cats and a creature with a zebra's head but a feline's tail also have an arrow in them. In all three instances, the arrows are in a different pigment to the animals and appear to have been added later by another hand. Above them, another artist has added a hunter carrying an arrow with the large triangular head of an arrow of potency.[18]

While antelope pierced with arrows are extremely unusual, paintings of many different species of animals, including many antelope, are painted upside down and were clearly intended to represent death. This is made clear by their limp, bent legs and extended twisted necks e.g. the antelope that have been killed by lions in **Figs.1.2 and 8.31.** The equation of all wounded, bleeding or dead animals with trance is more difficult to sustain than is the case with the large beasts but we have already examined at least one panel of paintings which suggests that dead antelope may have been equated with trance. In **Fig.9.8 above**, the unusually coherent panel of a large congregation of people and dancers, small antelope are painted along the bottom. They seem to us incongruous and thus not part of the main scene, but this may very well be false: certainly they seem to be in the same colour and style as the rest. As we have seen, the main scene centres on a single person recumbent in trance. The antelope in the right hand corner takes the characteristic posture of death and stands out from the rest of the animals as the trancer stands out from the rest of the people around him, sufficient at least to suggest that trancer and dead antelope have much in common. A similar dead antelope has been superimposed on the long files of hunters in **Fig.8.5**

above, another large assemblage of people, that we have seen has many attributes that take it beyond the realistic representation of hunting parties.

In many instances, animals have been painted upside down but with the rigid legs, taut tail and alert, raised head of a creature full of life; they are the reversed images of otherwise normal animals. **Fig.12.32** is the remains of three masterfully painted tsessebe: one is a reversed image of the others, fully alive and alert, and moving strongly with head raised. In the centre of **Fig.1.2 above**, where an antelope lies at the top with crumpled legs, perhaps the victim of the lion that stands over it, one of a number of small antelope in the centre of the panel is upside down but with no suggestion that it is dead. In the line of four warthog below the flecks of **Fig.15.26 below**, the two in the middle are kneeling and grubbing; one of them is upside down but is otherwise not in the least different from its companions.

The distinction between dead and reversed animals seems clear and intentional but its significance cannot yet be suggested. Perhaps the reversed animal also has some of the same connotations as the paintings of the archetypal recumbent trancer: both are incapable of movement but not unconscious and still in control of their limbs and their placement. It is even conceivable that the reversed animals may have been painted for no deeper reason than to demonstrate the technical virtuosity of the artist. If so, it is deceptive: once the techniques and conventions of the art are mastered, little more skill is needed to depict an animal upside down.

NOTES

1. An early version of this chapter appeared as Garlake, 1989b.

2. These are all 'explanations' of the paintings or its motivation that are widely held and expounded most articulately in Willcox, 1984b.

3. This would seem to be especially the case for those who hold to the popular interpretations of the art but they have never recognized their problem.

4. Cooke, 1959: 132, would consider them distinct 'styles' characteristic of different periods. That they can appear together and constitute a single scene may be further evidence of the weakness of this case and confirm that the 'outline style' is at least in part the product of the size of its images.

5. This appears to be the painting described in Woodhouse, 1976, as a "faded painting" of "seven men pursuing an elephant. The artefacts they carry are not identifiable with certainty but could be bows and arrows." He makes no mention of the second adjacent painting at all though he is purporting to be compiling a complete inventory of all paintings of elephant hunting. His 'copy' of this painting appears as Lee and Woodhouse, 1970: Fig.D11, and shows only three figures. Comparison of this figure with **Fig.12.4** is revealing. The multiple gross inaccuracies in word and image say enough of Woodhouse's competence as an observer, copier or analyst of rock paintings.

6. Cooke has reproduced a copy of a painting of a lion faced by two hunters, surrounded by arrows and bleeding from the nose: Cooke, 1959: Pl.84. It is possible therefore that lions were in the same category as the elephant, rhino and buffalo. Jones, 1949: Frontispiece and 61, reproduces what is said to be a cheetah hunt, with several of the animals upside down and therefore, he claims, dead. Cooke, 1974a, shows there is no indication that the animals are being hunted and that they are certainly lions and not cheetah.

7. This creature - and there are others like it (e.g. the large animal on the right of **Fig.1.1 above**, matching a large elephant) - is reminiscent of paintings in South Africa which were interpreted to early investigators as representing 'rain bulls' which trancers in their 'spirit travels' captured and killed in order to bring rain: Lewis-Williams and Dowson, 1989: 92-9.

8. Genge, 1983 and 1988c, sketches further examples of this image.

9. Goodall, 1959: Fig.12, illustrates a similar image from Ruchera, Mutoko District; the painting is mistakenly said to be at Rodedede Cave.

10. Selous, 1881: 48, 190-202.

11. Cooke, 1964d: 2, also remarks that "it is very doubtful if many elephant were accounted for by normal hunting methods. Small bone points and compound microlithic poisoned arrows would not be very effective against elephants". Cooke was unaware that there were nevertheless several painted scenes of elephant hunts and so did not seek to explain them. Lee, 1979: 234, notes that "No living Kung has ever killed an elephant or even participated in hunting one, except for a few men who have hunted them in the East with mounted Tswana

armed with guns. The reasons given for not hunting elephant are interesting. First, there is a belief that the elephant is a person in that it possesses intelligence as a human does. Neishi na said: 'We call it a zhutwa ('person') because it cries like a person and when it drinks it uses its trunk like a person uses its hands.' In the recent past, however, the Kung did hunt and kill elephant... 'They set grass fires and the people come in on the other side. The dogs worry it...people throw in their spears... They didn't put poison on their spears.'" In other words, the Kung found it possible to hunt elephant only with horses, firearms or large bodies of hunters armed with spears, presumably with heavy iron blades, and organised into drives with dogs. Almost none of this was available to Stone Age hunters.

12. What is quite certain is that these animals are not being hunted with the small, light composite arrows with detachable poisoned heads that are conventionally associated with the Later Stone Age and the San and considered their only weaponry. These arrows clearly have great power, pierce thick hides, penetrate deeply, cause severe internal damage and remain lodged in the wound in their entirety: a process quite unlike the results of San practices, in which only one or two arrows are shot at an animal, a small head detaches from its shaft and only it remains in the victim, and the poison on it gradually enters and acts on the bloodstream rather than causing significant trauma, and death takes a long time. But we have already established that the weapons of the hunters in the paintings were all indeed markedly larger, simpler and heavier that those associated with the Later Stone Age or San: still any arrow seems inadequate for the job shown in these scenes.

13. Katz, 1982: 46.

14. In South Africa, a large proportion of the similarly few hunting scenes have been linked with San accounts of rainmaking and interpreted as representing a trancer's view of making rain, by capturing a rain animal, binding and leading it to the lands that need rain, and there killing and dismembering it, and scattering the remains (Lewis-Williams, 1981a: Ch.8; Lewis-Williams, 1983b: 7-9; Lewis-Williams and Dowson, 1989: 92-9). Long ago, San informants interpreted some of these paintings in this way directly to Orpen, Bleek and Stow. Rain animals were heavy creatures somewhat like a bull or hippo, sometimes with trunks, and were found and captured in pools. Binding and leading them, sometimes with a thong round their heads, was an essential part of rainmaking. Their killing allowed their blood to fall as rain. Trancers carried out the process during trance, and representations of it are taken to be illustrations of hallucinatory experiences of trance.

There is no doubt that some of the creatures hunted in the paintings in Zimbabwe have the heavy build and bovid-like characteristics of the traditional rain animal (e.g. in **Fig.12.12**). So do some of the large animals that seem to

have been painted to match elephants (e.g the large animal on the right of the outline elephant in **Fig.1.1**). On the other hand, there is no suggestion in any painting in Zimbabwe that the animal has been captured or led to its fate, nor any association with pools of water. There are no recorded traditions associating the rain animal with elephant, rhino or buffalo. It is of course easy to see the streams of dots pouring from their wounds as rain rather than blood. Perhaps it is not necessary to distinguish between them: both Xam and Kung believed both rain and blood were powerful sources of potency (Solomon, 1991). In the absence of any clear, known, specific and limited indicators that the prey are rain animals or the scenes represent rainmaking, it seems preferable to associate the scenes of hunts with the more general release of potency, while recognising that such powerful imagery may well have comprehended connotations of rainmaking as well as trancing.

15. The experiences of trance in this paragraph are drawn once more from Katz, 1982, and were described more fully in Chapter 5.

16. Katz, 1982: 45.

17. There was once much controversy about the temporal significance of these different techniques. Goodall, 1959: 3-4, considers the large outline paintings one of the earliest manifestations of the art. Cooke, 1969: 50, places them, or at least those that are smeared with thick pigments or that appear as stains on the surface, at the end of his stylistic sequence.

18. Goodall, 1959: Fig.12, illustrates a pierced and dead antelope beneath a slaughtered elephant. Goodall, 1959: Fig 11, illustrates an antelope with head lowered and about to collapse, with two arrows in its back.

13. DISTORTIONS, TRANSFORMATIONS AND SPIRITS

This chapter differs somewhat in its approach to those that have gone before and those that follow. The imagery considered here is more difficult to analyse iconographically: there are fewer examples of some of the motifs, their elements are simpler and patterns of associations are less clear. As a consequence interpretation is more difficult. Though the imagery is very different from any in South Africa, the approach to interpretation in this chapter draws more heavily on that developed by Lewis-Williams in South Africa, relies more on somewhat vague ethnographic analogies, and indulges in some deplorable games of ethnographic snap. I consider the results, therefore, more tentative than those that are more soundly based on a larger body of material and more detailed iconographic considerations of more complex images. They are more pointers towards possible interpretations than reliable conclusions.

Stylistic elongation

In **Fig.13.1** there are what seem to be four well-drawn and apparently quite ordinary hunters but, in fact, some of the torsoes are obviously unnaturally elongated. The large group of seemingly equally ordinary hunters in **Fig.9.16 above** are all elongated in much the same ways: this becomes apparent because they are juxtaposed with comparatively stocky figures who have been inserted above them. Close examination reveals that in a great many sets of paintings, few of the figures have natural proportions.

The human body was regularly distorted, particularly in the elongated and gracefully curved backs of so many figures. The bodies of many animals, especially large antelope and particularly kudu cows, were also elongated in similar ways.[1] Many also have inordinately small heads. **Pl.6.1 above** is dominated by a fine frieze of 14 large kudu cows, carefully outlined in modulated white lines. All are walking fast and have unnaturally elongated and equally unnaturally thick necks and small heads. They contrast, perhaps

deliberately, with a group of eland above them whose proportions are much more realistic, a realism heightened by the leading eland which has broken into a canter, a movement rarely shown and here represented with great naturalism.

In **Fig.7.18 above**, the heads of the kudu bull and the cow beside him are reduced to the narrow line of the nose, to a greater extent than can be accounted for by any disappearance of the white of their lower jaws. At the bottom of **Fig.12.23 above**, two large kudu cows in an extended walk have elongated bodies, disproportionately thick necks, emphasis on the hair of the dewlap and disproportionately small heads. The kudu bull above them, by another hand, with much more natural proportions, serves to highlight their distortions.

In our eyes, humans and animals seem depicted with striking energy, vitality and conviction and many distortions seem to strengthen the expressive force and aesthetic grace of the imagery and to emphasise movement. We become so used to distortion that we forget how artificial the results are. These distortions are too widespread to be the idiosyncratic quirks of small groups of artists or regional schools. They seem to represent a general aesthetic, a basic convention, a fundamental component of 'style'. They are, however, as we can see, not universal. Therefore painters must have been fully aware that they were consistently distorting the proportions of the people and animals.

Extreme elongation and attenuation

It is with more extreme distortions that we are concerned here, distortions that seem to have been intended to go beyond style or aesthetics. The figure with long stick-like limbs above the hunters and on the left of **Fig.13.1** is one example, even more so the body of the figure on the right which is so elongated and undifferentiated that it is barely recognizable as human. The hunter at the top of **Fig.13.2** is a skilled painting with a crisp assured outline, studied sense of movement and careful detail, but has an extremely elongated body in comparison to his limbs. In a less skilled painting immediately below him, the same proportions are

given to a gatherer with two large tasselled bags slung from her shoulders and equally large tassels on her knees. In the same panel another artist has painted two male figures, **Fig.13.3.** Their bodies are even more elongated and in addition their limbs have lost all muscle and form, are reduced to their skeletal core and become no more than long thin lines. The figures' postures nevertheless remain so convincing that there is no doubt of the artist's abilities. One sits with one leg bent; the other is fully recumbent in the position that identifies the archetype of the trancer.

Equally attenuated figures have been illustrated among the dancers in Chapter 9. Extreme elongation and attenuation are apparent in the long line of men holding fly whisks and arrows of potency in **Fig.9.15**, those holding comb shapes in **Fig.9.19**, pipes in **Figs.9.21 and 9.22**, and flails in **Fig.9.31.** Many trancers are as elongated and attenuated: as in **Pl.10.1 and Figs.10.2 and 10.3 above.** The most noticeable feature of the eleven figures with lines coming from them in **Fig.11.17 above** is their extreme elongation and the way their bodies and limbs are reduced to formless and fleshless lines: again made even more apparent by the contrast with two small figures of normal, even stocky, proportions that have been added to the scene by a later artist.

Hoops, roundels and channels

Fig.13.4 shows a single hunter aiming a large bow and holding three long arrows. He has a tuft in the small of his back, the apparel of a dancer: a quiver, an unusual replacement in this area for a shoulder bag, containing more arrows; and his penis and scrotum are painted unusually large and in unusual detail. A tassel looks as if it might decorate the quiver but two others look at least as likely to be emanations from his arms. What is most unusual are the two hoops on each side of his neck: a pair joining neck to shoulder and the other pair semicircles emerging from the top of the neck and rejoining it at its base.

Fig.13.5 is a detail from the large group of hunters reproduced in **Fig.12.8 above.** Several have hoops on their necks and round swellings on their upper arms and penises.

Leaves, plumes and whisks or lines are attached to many of the arm swellings. These hoops and roundels were repeated by a later artist in smaller hunters which he inserted in and around the original participants (e.g the four figures top left), with such assurance and accuracy that there can be no doubt that he recognized and deliberately sought to emphasise the significance of the motifs he was imitating. In a panel of paintings on another face of the same rock, **Fig.8.7 above**, two women, elaborately clothed and one with her arms raised in the posture of a dance, have similar roundels painted on their upper arms.

Part of another group of hunters killing a large beast, painted with extraordinary skill, precision, delicacy and invention, is shown in **Fig.13.6**, a detail from **Fig.12.7 above**. The bodies of the hunters are elongated and have been given a graceful forward curve. A narrow stripe has been left blank, running up the whole length of some torsoes, either at the front or the back. Rounded shapes are again painted on the upper arms but nothing is attached to them. The roundel on the penis and the hooped neck do not occur. There is however a noticeable narrowing and elongation of the knee joint that seems to leave the bone exposed. In some figures, the ankles also seem to be thinned and elongated.

In **Fig.9.32 above**, the line of male dancers holding a range of accessories, almost all have roundels in their upper arms and smaller roundels on their penises, with their scrota again depicted. In several there are also curved swellings at the angle of neck and shoulder, reminiscent of neck hoops. Leaf and disc shapes are attached to the arm roundels of several. Two hunters carrying arrows of potency painted close to them and probably by the same artist, **Fig.7.14 above**, have similar arm roundels; one has a leaf attached to one arm roundel and a smaller roundel on his penis, the other only a bar rising from his penis. On an adjacent face of the same rock, another artist has painted two separate hunters, **Fig.8.3 above**, with roundels to arms and penises, scrota and, in one case, a leaf attached to one arm roundel. Both carry arrows of potency.

In **Fig.7.1 above** two men stand together. Though they are much less skilled paintings than those we have already examined, it is clear they also have arm roundels with something attached to them. Completing the group is a third figure with fully formed and detailed legs, penis and scrotum but with his upper body reduced to two thin, parallel and more or less straight lines, and with no arms or head. Similarly in **Fig.12.8 above** (and shown in part in **Fig.13.5**), one man standing still and erect behind one of the major figures holding a staff, has no arms and his legs are cut off at the knees. And again, among the hunters in **Fig.13.6** is a crouching figure who is reduced to a thin straight line above the waist. The body itself has entirely disappeared, leaving what seems to be the spine exposed in the same way that the bones of knee and ankle are elongated and exposed.

These truncated or incomplete figures are not unfinished, damaged or faded images. They are as careful, precise and well preserved as any figure around them. Nor are they illustrations of mutilations or dismemberment: they are not wounded, no bleeding is shown, and they are not sprawled or prone but, as far as they are able, stand or move just like their companions. Once the type is identified, it can be recognized that there are a great many small, precise and deliberately incomplete figures which lack some part of the body, either the head or parts or all of the limbs. There is one in **Fig.13.13**; another not only armless but elongated and attenuated appears in **Fig.13.18**. Ay the bottom centre of **Fig.1.1 above** there is a male figure leaning far forward without arms or head. Towards the centre of **Fig.1.2 above**, a male figure without arms and at most a very small head separated from the body (it is more likely to be a dot of paint like others painted as part of this composition), crouches to enter the painted outline of a circle, one of a line of four and probably originally five. A figure without arms or head runs inwards from the left of **Fig.1.4 above**. There are other similar incomplete figures in **Fig.7.13 above**; among the trancing hunters of **Fig.10.6 above**; and on the left of **Fig.12.23 above**. Such images can indeed be said to

pervade the art.

Interpretation

The distortions of the human body described so far can be related at least broadly to some of the ways that San have described the sensations of trance, what they feel and what they believe happens when their potency is activated. Verbal descriptions of the sensations of trance are subjective, many and various and express the inexpressible largely through metaphor. Describing trance is important, for trancers are concerned to share their trance experiences, to reassure novice trancers and to alleviate their very real fears of trancing. But, as we have repeatedly demonstrated, the art of its essence was not concerned with realistic illustration of such events but to reduce the experience to a standardised graphic system of legible, conventional and archetypal attributes. It is therefore too much to expect a full correlation between near-recent descriptions of trance and the paintings, but there do seem to be some general correspondences.

Trance demands fierce physical exertion and induces intense fear, emotion and stress. In full trance "there seems to be much physical tension in the body". Many descriptions speak of how the heart pounds, veins dilate, breathing becomes rapid, sweat flows profusely, muscles contract and cause cramp and spasms, the skin tingles and pricks, and the hair feels as if it is standing on end. Bodies feel stretched and racked with pain and as if "they are bursting open like a ripe pod". Potency 'boils', 'boils over' and 'bursts' in the gebesi, the lower abdomen, and then rises up through the body, along the backbone, 'front spine', through 'inner channels'. Kung women speak "with great emphasis" of " a hole, two or three inches across... going down through the body".[2]

The sense of the body being stretched has been interpreted as a common somatic, or sensory hallucination, characteristic of trance.[3] Extreme elongation and attenuation of the torso are the most pervasive bodily distortions in the paintings. In the hunters of **Fig.13.6**,

the curved and elongated torsoes can be equated with the stretching felt in trance, and so can the narrowing and elongation of the knee and ankle joints.

Another aspect of trance is that "during the death of full kia, the soul leaves the healer's body [and] goes to encounter god and the spirits of the dead ancestors."[4] The departure of the spirit is difficult to render visually but it could be said to leave the body incomplete. The recurrent paintings of people lacking parts or all of their limbs or head or with the torso reduced to narrow lines may be metaphorical representations of this spiritual loss.

Given that most paintings are monochrome and that the artistic conventions did not allow for any detail within the outline of the image, one way to draw attention to any internal organs was to leave a corresponding area of the body blank, like the lines up the bodies of the hunters in **Fig.13.6**. No other example of this is known, but we have seen that this is an extraordinary set of paintings in many ways.

Another way of showing internal elements of the body was to transpose them to the outside of the body, to enable them to break the body outline. An explanation of the hoops on the necks of the figures in **Figs.13.4 and 13.5** may be that they represent the dilated, pulsing veins that trancers experience as their hearts race. The Kung claim that particularly intense sensations are experienced in the neck during trance; arrows of potency are shot into the side of it; as potency heats, "around your neck... you feel tiny needles and thorns... When the inside of your neck go[es] 'za-za', that is the arrival of [potency]."[5] Similar emphases may have been given by the Xam, who paid particular attention to the "vertebral artery" which "stands up" during trance: "People must look out for his vertebral artery, for he would turn into a lion if they did not by singing make it lie down."[6]

Trancers experience sharp contractions and cramp in their muscles, so extreme in their abdomens that they cannot stand upright. The arm swellings in these paintings may

express an aspect of this and represent the cramped, contracted, bunched, knotted muscles of the trancer. Penis swellings may express similar dilation of the blood vessels, distension and erection, occurring in similar circumstances.

Thus, these distortions of the human anatomy can all be seen to further the visual expression of some of the sensations of trance: knotted muscles, dilated veins, stretched bodies, stretched and exposed bones and channels within the body up which potency can rise. Where elongations of the body are a general phenomenon, the distortions of neck, upper arm and penis are much more restricted occurrences. The paintings of **Figs.13.4-6**, where they appear most clearly and emphatically, though by several different artists, are all within about 25 miles of each other. They may be evidence of a small regional school of painters who, in a limited number of paintings, developed new visual equivalents, idiosyncratic new anatomical emphases, enlarging their ability to portray some of the sensations of trance.

Transformation and birds

The Kung and Xam believed many trancers were able to transform themselves into animals and that this enabled trancers to travel outside their own bodies and visit distant friends, relatives, camps and hunting grounds, and obtain information on game movements and resources of food and water, the most important intelligence desired by every hunting group. Transformed into or embodied in animals, trancers also engage the spirit world, guard and protect their camp at night and fight off evil spirits that are also embodied in animals.[7] The Xam also believed that trancers transformed into small birds which hovered above, sang to and even perched on the people of whom they sought news. The trancer "turns into a little bird, he comes to see us where we live and flies about our heads. Sometimes he sits on our heads, he sits peeping at us to see if we are still as we were when we left him."[8]

Successive stages of the transformation of humans into birds seem to be shown unusually clearly in one dramatic painting. In **Fig.13.7** a set of six figures, in the same

pigment and by the same artist, have been painted close together (the whole panel containing them is shown in **Fig.7.24 above**). At the top left, an almost completely realistic bird flaps its wings; it has long thin legs, talons, wings, long thin neck, a plumed crest and a large gaping beak; the lower beak has a blunt tip. Around it are five extraordinary figures; all are male to judge by the shapes and hard lines of their bodies and the vigour of their gestures; they are also hunters, for one has a hunting bag with arrows on his shoulder and another holds a bow and arrows. However all take on features of the bird to a greater or lesser degree: all have unusually long necks but their thickness is human; all have most unusual open, protruding mouths and two have the same gaping beak as the bird; all have long narrow heads and three have lines on the backs of their heads like the plumage on the bird's crown. Their legs are bony and fleshless like a birds' and end in small protrusions like the end of the shin bone rather than feet or talons. One arm of the running figure ends in fingers, a feature seldom shown, and they are unnaturally long, like a bird's talons. Three of the figures lie on their backs with their legs bent back against their bodies and one of these holds his head: indicative of trance. The figure beside the bird has lost his lower arms and his upper arms and back have sprouted bristles or feathers: his arms are turning into wings. Elsewhere on the panel (see **Fig.7.24 above**), the same artist has painted another seven of these creatures, all with the same gaping beak-like mouths, bony limbs, talon-like fingers and bony protrusions in place of feet. All run fast and excitedly and wave their arms high and wildly as if to imitate flight. These images can be arranged in a sequence progressing from hunters, unusual only in the thinness and length of their limbs, necks and heads and their fingers, their open mouths and the agitation of their movements, to recumbent figures with beaks, who grow feathers and wings and finally become a grotesque but definite bird.

In **Fig.13.8** another artist tackled a similar theme in a

different way. In a long sequence of paintings, a large design based on oval shapes has had an almost equally large elephant painted over it (see **Fig.12.24 above** for the full panel). Along the elephant's back and painted at about the same time as it are a series of thirteen figures; what unites all them all are their very long thin arms and legs, the lower parts of which were painted in white. Their arms end in long bright red talons rather than fingers and some of their feet also end in talons. None have plumage or beaks but most have their arms raised, spread and seemingly waving in bird-like flight and one, top left, floats horizontally with what seem to be feathers starting to grow down his legs. One crouches and holds the elephant's back; another crouches low; another lies on his back with his legs in the air, possibly in a variation of the supine attitudes of trancers. The relevance of birds to this process of transformation, seems to be made explicit by the realistic bird with long legs, long neck and pointed beak amongst the figures and, immediately above it, a creature with feathered wings outspread and a human-like head.

At the elephant's head (see **Fig.12.24 above**), the same artist has painted five more of these figures. Two of these, lowest right, have grown what look like wings, though one also keeps his long thin arms. Another is again supine with legs raised. Later artists elaborated or commented on this process: one has painted a figure of a hunter under the elephant's belly, with hunting bag and holding a small pouch. His limbs and posture are less distorted but he has the suggestion of fingers and the open beak and crown plumage of the figures in **Fig.13.7**.

In **Fig.13.9** (a detail from the full panel shown in **Fig.12.23 above**) the earliest painting was the outline of a large buffalo; five adult and two young tsessebe were later painted across its body. Still later, the buffalo's back and tail were repainted in thick yellow and white stripes. Seven human figures were painted in the same pigments, attached to and above its back. They are anatomically very simple, stiff, without muscles, sex, or weight. Bodies, heads and

limbs are all narrow and elongated and outlined in white; they also had white faces and white stripes across their bodies and down their limbs. Three crouch, clamber along and grasp the buffalo's back and at least one of these kneels and floats above the back, just like the creatures on the lines emitted by distended figures (see **Fig.11.18 above**). Two more crouch and kneel just above the first figures, away from direct contact with the buffalo. Above, one figure is crouched or sprawled, arms outstretched and waving. A figure, on the left, is in a sitting position but again makes no direct contact with the buffalo. An eighth figure, behind it, in the same pigments, has probably deliberately been left incomplete, without head or lower legs and only a suggestion of arms.

These three sets of images, all within 25 miles of each other, are coherent, the first almost a narrative and sequential composition, which seem to deal with transformations into feathered or bird-like creatures. In contrast, **Fig.13.10** shows the same transformation within a single image: a one-legged male figure, with a mane, tufts on head and penis, and two long lines of blood flowing from his nose, has his arms reduced to feathered wings. He brings a cluster of indicators of the supernatural - blood, bodily emanations and transforming effects - together in a single composite image. He is painted above a woman with her stick, outlined and decorated in white, but has no clear association with her.

Since all these figures appear to be changing into birds, it is worth briefly examining other instances of birds in the paintings. Several human figures already illustrated have birds clutched in their hands or perched on them or their equipment. In **Fig.8.15 above**, a gatherer has a bird perched on one elbow and another on the end of a stick she has in her bag. In **Fig.11.17 above**, two of the many thin, sprawled figures with long zig-zag lines coming from various parts of their bodies hold birds by their necks. In **Fig.13.12** a figure, whose place in transformation is discussed below, does the same and also clutches a small

animal. It is difficult to see these as illustrations of reality: birds do not normally perch on people and cannot be held, tense but still, in the ways shown. Most of the paintings showing them also contain indicators of trancing and **Fig.11.17 above** is a powerful and sustained scene of the effects of trance.

We have already noticed the creature with a human head which hovers with the outstretched wings of a bird among the transforming figures of **Fig.13.8**. A similar creature with an even clearer human head, body and single leg, stretches its wings over one of the symbolic hunts in **Fig.12.13 above**. Another, more human still but with long lines like feathers terminating its outstretched arms, is placed beside images that conflate elements of elephants, oval designs and incomplete creatures in **Fig.15.15 below**. **Fig.7.26 above** seems another image of one of these creatures, though with no associations.

The figures in **Fig.13.7** are transforming into large birds with long legs, necks and bills, resembling storks. A very similar bird is placed under the hovering creature and among the transforming figures of **Fig.13.8**. In **Fig.8.17 above**, there is another placed beside the trancer and group of women in camp but adorned with stripes of body paint. Another, apparently deliberately incomplete, is above the three kudu in **Fig.12.23 above**. Another is under the kneeling chorus in **Fig.12.26 above**. On the other side of the elaborately adorned single dancer from it, stands a line of smaller and much more realistic birds, flapping their wings (not shown in **Fig.12.26 above**).

Transformation and lions

The best known and most feared transformation that a Kung or Xam trancer could undergo was to a lion.[9] A trancer whose spiritual energy is so strong and active that he is losing control of it, fears that he will be unwittingly transformed into an animal, particularly a lion, the epitome of uncontrolled and therefore harmful and malevolent potency. "If a sorcerer's blood vessels do not lie down, he grows hair, he becomes a beast of prey, he wants to bite people...

Lions hair comes out on his back, people rub it off with fat, they rub pulling the hair out."[10] For the Xam, lions were very like humans: "When he kills game, he acts like a man; he will not eat the game he has killed at the place where he has killed it... He used to open it like a man so that he may bury the contents of the stomach... He will carry off the thing without eating it."[11] More, "the lion often turns into a person... it trots along like a man... for it feels like a real man."[12] Malevolent trancers prowl round the camp at night in the bodies of lions, full of ill-will, seeking who they can harm and bringing sickness and disaster.[13] It has been claimed for the Xam "that sometimes no clear distinction was drawn between lions and medicine men" and that the lion was "a symbol of the anti-social possibilities of trance."[14] "The Kung believe that a few of the most powerful trancers of the past could transform themselves into lions, who stalked the desert in search of human prey... This ability to become lions is the only one attributed to the healer that is not benevolent."[15]

Two panels of paintings next to each other, **Figs.13.11 and 13.12**, seem to illustrate the process of transformation into a lion. The figures have swollen stomachs, thighs and calves, distortions emphasised by feet so tiny they are barely if at all visible; their mouths gape wide revealing pairs of tusk-like fangs curving upward; their heads are covered in bristles or tufts; they hold leaf and comb shapes, a small animal, a bird and other objects and, in **Fig.13.11**, some have their penises protruding from their backs: disturbing imagery and at present unique. They culminate in one of the strangest and most fearsome images: **Fig.13.12.** It also has tusks protruding from its gaping mouth and holds a comb; its body is covered in hair and it has grown paws, horns and a long carnivore's tail, turning it into a chimera whose closest resemblance is to a fearsome lion-trancer.

Fig.13.13 encapsulates this process of transformation into a feline in a single image. The creature's large compact head, short thick neck and long tail are feline: but its legs, upright stance and straight extended upper limbs

are human and, appropriate to a spirit, it seems limp and without strength. It has been outlined in white and given white claws and crest. Above it is a truncated human body, without head, arms or lower legs.

Transformation and baboons

Some semi-human creatures have many of the features of baboons - or some baboons are given semi-human attributes. In **Fig.13.14** the two largest 'baboons' have great manes growing from their upper backs, and what look very like human hind legs and feet and, in one instance, fingers or claws on its forelegs. The same features appear less clearly on two more 'baboons' on the lower right. It might seem initially that these were intended to represent baboons pure and simple but, on the upper right, two more heavily maned 'baboons' with human limbs, one of whom holds to its mouth and presumably eats a stick-like object, take up a sitting position using their tails as supports, an inventive caprice of which no baboon is capable and which looks like an intelligent human response to having a tail.

Another creature with a baboon's tail, **Fig.13.15**, has large bristles all down its back, almost sufficiently thick to be compared to the spikes found along the backs of some transformed elephants (see **Figs.15.13-15 below**). The baboon in **Fig.13.16** is outlined and decorated with white lines, including multiple parallel lines on one leg, very suggestive of a dancer's multiple bangles. **Fig.6.5 above** includes two baboons, one with fingers or claws on all four feet and the other maned. These creatures, at first glance simply baboons, clearly combine strong human elements with two of the established indicators of the transforming powers of potency: manes and claws.

In **Fig.13.17** there are three more creatures who hold their paws or hands to their mouths and sit upright in a human way, but their heads and tails are more those of a carnivore than a baboon. Others like them surround an attenuated human figure and perhaps attack it, apparently biting at its head and groin. All are twisted, contorted or distorted, sufficient to remove them from the animal world.

Three similar creatures appear again, though tailless, in **Fig.13.18**, and again are active and busy, one holding another's back, though the significance of what they are doing remains impenetrable.

It is scarcely unexpected, given their close physical similarities to humans, that the Xam at least should attribute particularly strong human qualities to baboons, especially given beliefs in the primal unity of human and animal creation. "The baboons were once people at the time when we who are now people were not here... They feel that they were once people... Therefore their parts resemble humans, for they feel that they are people. That is why their parts smell of people... The baboons imitate the Bushmen... They sing sounding like Bushman women... Baboons speak Bushman, speak sounding like Bushmen." [16] If one is to make analogies between paintings and beliefs, this suggests more that these paintings may express the essential humanity of baboons rather than any transformation of people to baboons, of which there seem to be no accounts in Xam records in contrast to the abundant evidence for transformations to lions and birds.

Indications of transformation or the potential for it may be visually comparatively minor attributes of a great many human figures. Feathers, claws, bristles or excessive hair are significant elements of the figures already discussed. The dancers in **Fig.9.14 above** also have long white talons or claws painted on their hands; and the men among them have a great deal of 'hair', shown as lines falling across and obscuring their heads. The dancers' unnaturally twisted feet may be a further indicator of transformation.

Some figures seem to have other malformations beginning at the extremities of their arms. At least eight figures at the top centre of **Fig.12.26 above** have arms that come to a sharp point and are unusually thick above this, so that they look like 'flippers' or the leaf shape that is a feature of so many dancers, though here it is clearly a malformation of the body and not something held or tied to it. It can be

seen on both a man and woman dancing together at the top centre of **Fig.15.21 below.** Similarly, the four hunters so delicately painted in **Fig.14.10 below** have thick shapeless arms without hands contrasting with their thin legs and tiny, but clear, feet. Three of the five pipers in **Fig.9.20 above** have their free arms grotesquely distorted into zig-zag lines. Malformations of the arms were painted sufficiently carefully and sufficiently often for us to be certain that they were intentional and significant.

Some creatures that appear to be almost entirely animals also bear these signs of transformation. **Fig.13.19** shows one of a line of three creatures with distended, almost spherical bodies, formless heads, long straight trunks, and bristles all along their backs and down their tails. Their legs, more the shape of an antelope's than an elephant's, are straight, stiff, extended, carry no weight and end in claws.

<u>One-legged figures</u>

One particular type of incomplete figure, a person with only one leg, was often painted.[17] Like the incomplete figures we have examined, these also are not damaged or unfinished: the single leg is usually modelled and delineated with great care. They are often superimposed on accomplished representations of human figures so they cannot represent, as has been claimed, an 'early' or 'primitive style' of painting in which objects were represented in 'strict silhouette' because artists had not yet mastered the graphic problems posed in representing legs one behind the other.[18]

A single cave contains several one-legged figures, isolated and in groups, that are more carefully coloured and detailed than any other images of this sort and indeed than almost any human images in the entire corpus of the art: **Figs.13.20 and 13.21.** They are in at least three colours - ochre, grey and white. Their expanded chests, indented waists, narrow hips and single well-formed legs are shown in profile. There is no indication of their sex. They look straight at the viewer with two very large upright oval ochre eyes, like those of a mantis. These are the only known examples of any painting with elements like those of a mantis

in them known in Zimbabwe. This prompts recollections that the name of the most important and benevolent god of the Xam, Kaggen, was also the Xam word for mantis, that one of his many embodiments was as a mantis, and that at least one Xam trancer "had Mantises... was a Mantis's man".[19]

These creatures also have grey upright pointed ears set on the tops of their heads and a white line across the tops of their heads joining their ears together. We shall see below that such ears are a prime characteristic of figures best interpreted as spirits recreated by the supreme being.

In **Fig.13.20**, grey pigment forms one arm, outlines an oval shape placed in front of the chest and continues down the thigh of the top figure. The bottom figure has the whole interior of its body and upper leg filled with grey and white stripes and its face and neck speckled with white dots. It carries a trapezoidal shape, suspended from a horizontal handle; a second rigid horizontal brace at the bottom seems to force the lower corners of the object outwards. In Chapter 15, both ovals and dots will be shown to be among the most important symbols of potency in the art.

In a group of four of these figures close by, **Fig.13.21**, only traces of the grey of their faces, ears and necks, remain. The one on the left again has its chest filled with a different colour - a paler ochre. What looks like grey shading again runs down much of the front of the body. In one hand, it waves a crescent and in the other an object denoted by two separate lines, one slightly curved. Its eyes are joined; it has a white line across the crown and a tuft or tail above its buttocks. The other three are very similar and wave similar objects. At least three have leaf shapes hanging down from their left upper arms. Four trapezoidal objects - like that carried in **Fig.13.20**, two large triangular objects and three leaf-shapes suspended in a bunch from a horizontal line, lie beneath them.

Nearby there are other one-legged figures but they do not have the same eyes or the same amount of detail; where the grey has disappeared, their heads can appear as a horizontal oval detached from their bodies. One such figure

has a deeply indented triangle down the centre of its chest: **Pl.13.1.** The three dancers of **Fig.9.2 above** were painted in the same pigment by the same artist but they have two legs - though one and probably two may have been deliberately painted with only one foot. The leader holds the same unidentifiable objects as those of the one-legged figures: a trapezoid, stick and crescent - or the device indicated by the pair of lines, one straight, one curved - perhaps they are otherwise unrepresented musical instruments.

Much less detailed but equally carefully considered one-legged figures occur in many other panels. **Fig.13.22** has eight figures crouched, kneeling, falling and sprawling beside a lion, who have the same attenuated limbs, flailing arms and uncontrolled positions of the men in **Fig.11.17.** Three of them have only one leg though they are clearly as much part of the scene as the other, more normal figures. Other examples are the large, pale and early figure in **Fig.7.24 above**, painted on the extreme left of the panel including the transformation scene of **Fig.13.7**; perhaps the strange slumped forms in **Fig.8.35 above**; two of the pipers in **Fig.9.23 above**; and the recumbent trancer of **Fig.10.3 above.** In **Fig.11.4 above** there are six of these images: at least three are crouched with their backs horizontal; two have their arms held rigidly behind their backs; one, top right, may bleed from his face like other figures in this panel; while one, extreme right, who lies on his back with his leg in the air, may be pierced by arrows and certainly has the large clear head of an arrow of potency protruding from the base of his back. All are suggestive of aspects of trance. In **Fig.15.24 below** at least one of the participants in a scene involving flecks of potency being released over trees has only one leg.

Animals were treated similarly. In **Fig.10.3 above**, between the recumbent trancer and the oval design, are two small creatures with trunks and bristles on the back of their necks. They have only one fore and one hind leg; their trunks and legs are stiff and extended; and the posture is static. Another can be recognized in front of and below the

large bovine in **Fig.1.1 above**. In **Fig.15.21 below**, there are four creatures with some similar features: they have not got trunks but two have only the single fore and hind leg; and they are small, stiff, compact, static, rotund bodies; are outlined in dots that give the effect of bristles; and have claws. There are more dots clustering on a branched form beside them.

The paintings of one-legged figures may again seek to represent a supernatural state, a sense of bodily or spiritual incompleteness distinct from that represented by truncated figures with both legs or both arms omitted, or a visual convention to indicate that the figures are in the process of transformation. They may however depict beings of the world that trancers are able to enter, where spirits of the dead and the gods are visible.

The spirit world

There are some recurrent images among the paintings that it is difficult to equate with distortions or transformations associated with trance. They seem rather to suggest very particular types of creatures engaged in the same sorts of activities as those of humans and with many human attributes but which are emphatically not human.

The one-legged figures in **Figs.13.20 and 13.21** have long pointed ears; this seems to be an attribute that distinguishes and defines a whole range of figures in the paintings. In these two illustrations, the shapes of their faces is uncertain because they face the viewer, but most others with these ears have equally diagnostic long, sharply pointed muzzles: **Fig.13.23**. Here the figures are clearly male with distinct barred penises, but with capes tied round their necks and hanging down their backs. They walk in a calm and altogether human way. In **Fig.13.24** two of these creatures attack each other with clubs: they have the large ears, long pointed faces and thin limbs, and also tails that are so long they seem endless. In **Fig.10.8 above**, two of these creatures sit on the cusps of an oval design and bleed from their muzzles; again, the way they sit and hold out their arms is particularly lifelike. In **Fig.11.9 above**,

similar creatures, one at least with a woman's breasts, have ears that are immediately identifiable as those of a kudu and their heads are also those of an antelope. Again they are so long and thin that one fears that their limbs must fracture; one has to support herself with a long stick. Another is encircled by the lines issuing from a woman. Amongst the figures around trees covered in a haze of flecks in **Fig.15.24 below**, there are two more of them; they have been very deliberately related to the men around them by an emblem they all share: a very long, thin, straight line ending in a small blob that replaces the penis.

Pointed ears and muzzle have been given to one of the more elaborate of the distended figures, as in **Fig.11.7 above**; to a small figure with more normal proportions, but with lines coming from his abdomen in **Fig.14.8 below**; and to a figure, equally unrelated to those around him, in **Fig.1.4 above**.

Their distinctive attributes seem to separate these figures from most human figures. The limbs of most of them are long thin stick-like lines with no indications of shape or muscle, completely fleshless, reduced to a bony essence, scarcely able to support any weight at all. They are often so thin and elongated, as fragile and long-reaching as a spider's legs, yet they are always carefully jointed in a completely human way.[20] Insect-like, incorporeal, weightless, ethereal wraiths, they still sit and walk and gesture in completely, even exaggeratedly human ways that further heighten the ghostly and surreal effects of their proportions. Their gestures emphasise their humanity as their bodies deny it. All show the same contrast between convincingly human attitudes and stances and entirely unhuman heads and limbs. Denied the expressive aids of normal bodies, they rely solely on very human movements for conviction. These figures do not seem to be expressions of human sensations, not even the most extreme sensations of trance. They are also more than transformations, more than partial replacements of human with animal attributes, more than conflation or addition. Something, indeed almost

everything, has departed from their bodies, leaving only disembodied action. They may then represent spirits with only the remote residues of their bodies, almost entirely unworldly and ethereal.

The Kung "believe strongly and vividly in the existence of spirits of the dead... they fear them, pray to them to invoke their mercy or sympathy, exhort them in anger". The creator god takes the spirit from a dead person in the form of heart and blood and turns these into a gauwa. Gauwasi "have bodies which resemble those they had on earth except for their hair... eat the same food as humans... have their own implements, weapons, karosses etc. and keep their own spouses. They descend from the sky on strong, invisible cords and move about on earth... They are sure to come to [trance] dances and are always there in the shadows and are visible to people in trance. They are "associated within peoples' minds primarily with sickness and death," are conveyors of great evils but not wholly evil.[21] There is one graphic parallel to these descriptions in this set of images that may lend a little support to their interpretation as spirits: the tails that come from the two creatures in **Fig.13.24**, so long that they are like the tails of no other creatures, may not be tails at all but the cords on which spirits descend from the spirit world.

We have in this chapter drawn from the imagery possible aesthetic responses to the subjects, conventions of style, sensations of trance, transformations of trancers, creatures of primal creation, forms of gods and spirits. Some of these correspondences are no more than isolated allusions to equally isolated ethnographic analogies. Some paintings - like the transformation scenes - seem to correspond closely and in detail with surviving San beliefs. Others suggest that references in the imagery go beyond trance and potency as we understand them from the records of the recent past. The imagery cannot all be fitted easily into explanatory models developed round trance. As with the more realistic human imagery, we are in the presence of carefully constructed archetypes but ones whose allusions and

significance are now almost entirely lost.

NOTES

1. Previous workers have placed great emphasis on the different treatment of humans and animals in the paintings (e.g Cooke, 1969: 25, 30). They described paintings of human figures as unreal, stereotyped, stylised sketches and caricatures and speculated that people must have feared that identifiable portraits could become the vehicles for magic and for this reason tabooed realistic representation. In contrast, paintings of animals were seen in contrast as almost preternaturally realistic and accurate, outdoing even the modern high-speed camera in their ability to capture movement. We can now see that this is all entirely false.

2. Katz, 1982: 165, 41, 42, 44, 137.

3. Lewis-Williams and Dowson, 1989: 76-7.

4. Katz, 1982: 100.

5. Katz, 1982: 46, 165, 168.

6. Bleek, 1935: 23. Lewis-Williams, 1981a: 78, considers that the Xam word for 'vertebral artery' can also be translated as 'to boil' and hence may refer more directly to potency.

7. Bleek, 1935: 24-5, 27, 30.

8. Bleek, 1935: 18.

9. Bleek, 1932a, 1935: 2; Lewis-Williams, 1985b.

10. Bleek, 1932a: 23; 1935: 2.

11. Bleek, 1932a: 55.

12. Bleek, 1932a: 55, 61.

13. Bleek, 1936a: 131-2.

14. Lewis-Williams, 1985b: 55.

15. Katz, 1982: 101, quoting Lee.

16. Bleek, 1931: 167, 175-7.

17. See also Thornycroft, 1988.

18. Goodall, 1959: 3-4.

19. Lewis-Williams and Dowson, 1989: 13; Bleek, 1936a: 143.

20. See Goodall, 1959, Pl.45.

21. Marshall, 1962: 241-4.

14 EMBLEMS [1]

When the paintings of human figures are examined with the patience and concentration and in the detail that the discipline of exact tracing demands, it is soon apparent that there is a repetitive range of stereotyped, standardised and conventionalised motifs attached to them. On cursory examination, the apparent normality of the images overpowers many of these until, in our eyes, they can seem to be at most no more than artistic quirks so small and insignificant that we censor them from our consciousness. Most have therefore gone unremarked in all previous studies of the art. However, the main reason for their neglect lies in previous attitudes to the art: almost everyone has been implicitly or explicitly, but entirely, committed to the view that almost all the paintings, except for those that depict invented creatures, do nothing more than illustrate aspects of the San natural or supernatural worlds. They have not studied the paintings comparatively, analytically or iconographically, nor recognized that they may not be illustrations but intellectual constructs, graphic manifestations of San concepts. The result has been not just a lack of perception and penetration but an insensitivity that ensured that many details were not just left without any attempt at explanation, not just ignored: they were not even seen.

Most of these motifs are readily legible, stylised, conventionalised forms, clear, simple and distinct, and are best distinguished from other attributes by calling them emblems. It seems reasonable to assume that each probably had a single, equally limited, precise and specific denotation. They are thus probably one of the few elements of the art which may possibly be susceptible to 'decoding'. If we examine their contexts, we may be able to understand at least something of what they denoted and the ways that they did this. My conclusions at present can only be tentative, but necessary, first steps towards formulating hypotheses that might be tested in the future.[2]

Additions to the head

Emblems are attached to many different parts of the body: the head, arms, hands, shoulders, armpits, chest, navel, stomach or penis. The commonest are on the head: they are so frequent and obvious in the illustrations throughout this work that the way they have been ignored so far has probably irritated readers who have noticed them and wondered what they represented; however in order not to burden and disrupt the themes of the earlier chapters, it seemed best to delay analysis and attempts at their explanation until they could all be considered together. They include a crest of straight upright lines, all of the same length and set across the crown; the same lines but parted in the middle; lines down the back of the head like a 'mane'; an inverted triangle on the crown; a series of 'tufts' - small, inverted and splayed-out triangles or crescentic shapes atop a thin stem across the crown. Much more rarely, figures may have one or more carefully shaped plumes, as in **Fig.9.33 above**; or lines across and entirely obscuring the face, as in the falling and recumbent figures on the right of **Fig.8.7 above** or the two hunters flanking the dancers in **Figs.9.14 above and 15.17 below**. Head adornments are rarely found in family or camp scenes. Women in their roles as mothers or gatherers never have them; nor do their children e.g. **Figs.8.17-21 above.** Men amongst their families can have cones on their heads but the majority do not: **Figs.8.20 and 8.21 above.** The men embracing their wives in the midst of the crested and maned hunters in **Fig.7.21 above** may have the suggestion of manes. People in dissent or cooperation or in the few scenes illustrating everyday activities also have nothing; neither do men hunting small animals with clubs or animals in burrows with sticks.

Some hunters have carefully painted manes, as in **Fig.7.12 above.** Lines of hunters may have both crests and manes: those in **Fig.13.1 above** have parted crests and manes. All except one of the group of hunters resting with their equipment round them in **Fig.8.1 above** have a cone or cones with tasselled ends on their heads as well as manes down the

backs of their heads while almost all those in the very long lines of hunters in **Fig.8.5 above** have crests. The group of hunters, **Fig.9.16 above**, have single tufts, short cones or longer cones on their heads: one could be considered a crest. Tufts are painted on the clearest hunter of the elephant at the bottom left of **Fig.12.3 above**. Many of the hunters engaged in hunting large animals have crests and manes, as in **Fig.12.4 above**. Most of the hunters in **Fig.12.8 above** have crests, sometimes parted; only one has a mane as well; and many have nothing on their heads. Three of the five men hunting the buffalo in **Fig.12.10 above** have a single tuft and another's crest is divided into three. On the other hand, none of the hunters of the large unidentifiable beast in **Fig.12.12 above** have crests or manes, though two may have single cones.

Most male dancers have no additions to their heads, e.g. **Figs.9.1, 9.2, 9.5-8, 9.11, 9.12 and 9.30 above**. Crests are a feature of the long line of male dancers in **Fig.9.15 above**. The line of attenuated pipers in **Fig.9.22 above** have tufts right across their heads, while the pipers in **Figs.9.21 and 9.24 above** have crests. The long line of attenuated figures holding flails in **Fig.9.31 above** have pronounced manes. The dancers with discs and a variety of other objects in **Fig.9.33 above** have a single plume on their heads and so do two dancers in the other dance with a great variety of gear, **Fig.9.32 above**, though most have parted crests and one of them has a tuft. The same artist painted two men behind them, more dancers than hunters for one wears tails and both carry arrows of potency, **Fig.7.14 above**: their heads are covered by hair falling down both sides and a single tuft on the crown.

Women dancing have head adornments more frequently than men, though these never include crests. Those in **Fig.9.3 above** have manes like their male partners; so does the solitary dancer waving her whisks in the bottom right hand corner of **Fig.15.21 below**. The line of women dancers with lines coming from their distended abdomens in **Fig.9.29 above** have tufts across their heads; so do the line of clapping

women in **Fig.14.8.** The more elaborate women with distended stomachs frequently have manes and may also have tufts: **Figs.11.1-3 above.**

Almost none of the recumbent male trancers have head adornments, though there are manes on the trancers illustrated in **Pl.10.1 and Fig.10.2 above.** The fully recumbent and several of the falling figures in **Fig.10.6 above** have crests, but they have the equipment of hunters as well. Like the recumbent trancers, few of the distorted, elongated, attenuated, one-legged or spirit figures have anything attached to their heads.

In contrast, most transforming figures have an array of emblems on their heads. The women in **Fig.9.14 above**, covered in white dots, dancing and with claws and twisted feet suggesting transformation, have sets of carefully shaped white plumes on their heads while the men dancing with them and the pair of hunters flanking them have curved white lines hanging down and almost completely covering their heads. Crests are found on figures transforming into birds, e.g. **Fig.13.7 above**, and seem to represent birds' plumage. The figures in **Figs.13.11 and 13.12 above**, that may illustrate transformation into a lion, have crests, parted crests or tufts but no manes. Some malformed figures attached to lines have manes, e.g. **Fig.11.18 above.**

Few have questioned that most head adornments were anything more than illustrations of elaborate ways of dressing the hair. Given the generally short, sparse, tightly curled hair of the San, this seems improbable, despite Dornan's remark that the Masarwa San on the borders of Zimbabwe eighty years age had more hair than most San and "some comb it out, it hangs down to neck or chin in long twisted chords of uniform length".[3]

The most popular interpretation of the crest rising from a hunter's head has been that it illustrates arrows stuck in a head band and ready for rapid use.[4] Precedent for this comes from Stow, who described San hunters who carried some arrows "for rapid use as well as to strike their enemies with terror... sticking out like rays... from a fillet round their

heads" or placed on each side of the head "so arranged as to represent horns".[5] This cannot explain the Zimbabwe crests: the lines are much smaller in length and thickness, and completely different in form, lacking flight or head, to the arrows that hunters carry in their hands e.g. in **Figs.8.4, 8.5 or 12.8 above.**

Crests have been seen more recently as illustrations of "erect hair... another physiological feature of dying animals which is associated with... trance" and tufts as "arrow points [which] may be another link with the beehive since Bushmen compare the sting of a wasp with the sharp tip of an arrow."[6] The first interpretation is weakened by the many figures that have both crests and manes: dying is unlikely to cause only some hair to rise. The reasoning behind the second interpretation is tenuous and difficult to follow; it seems to be attempting to bring tufts into a relationship with bees as an important source of potency. But tufts are a standardised motif that has no resemblance to any arrowheads in the paintings or to the 'arrowhead shapes' which we shall see, in Chapter 15, are associated with some oval designs and now generally interpreted as bees just as the designs themselves are generally interpreted as bees' nests. Both these interpretations are further examples of the dangers of trying to match motifs with San beliefs without any consideration of their iconography, the range of their forms, their contexts or associations.

The commonest emblem of the hunter, the lines down the back of the head, are slightly reminiscent of a stylised rendering of a lion's mane. This is suggestive, given that Kung and Xam believed that trancers with dangerously active degrees of potency might change into lions and they were massaged at the top of their backs and along the back of the neck to prevent them growing a mane: the sign that the feared change was taking place.[7] Some San groups substitute 'hair' or 'mane' to avoid using the animal's name directly.[8] In a similar way perhaps, though lions themselves were rarely painted, aspects of their powers and their relationships with people may have been represented through the 'manes' on the

heads of so many hunters.

It is otherwise difficult to see any direct and completely convincing correspondences to actual objects in any of these head emblems. It also seems initially that nothing can be teased out from the apparent confusion of contexts in which head emblems are found. None seems exclusive: more than one can occur on a single head and certainly on the heads of different members of groups. It seems that some apparently different emblems may denote the same things: there seems little distinction between the ways that manes and various forms of crests were applied. They are found almost exclusively on men, the exception being women who are dancing, releasing potency or transforming and especially those with distended abdomens. There is some correlation of manes and crests with men as hunters and particularly those hunting large animals and a tendency towards a negative correlation of these forms with dancing. Tufts and cones seem to have significantly broader contexts. There is a strong but not absolute negative correlation between head ornaments and recumbent male trancers.

These barely discernable regularities become explicable in part if these adornments are taken as representations of potency in areas of human activity that would seem superficially to have little directly or obviously to do with it but which were important and fraught with risk, danger and uncertainty and where potency would have an important influence on their outcome. Thus where the effects of potency are visually obvious, as they are in direct representations of trancers or those clearly experiencing effects of trancing, there was no need to add emblems of potency. In the same way, dancing was denoted by such a range of explicit attributes that the use of head emblems was superfluous. But where men are hunters or actually engaged in dangerous hunting, emblems of potency, and perhaps particularly of different forms of potency which would influence the outcome of the hunt, were given prominence.

Signs attached to the penis

Several emblems or, more probably, increasingly elaborate

variations of the same emblem, are often attached to the penis. In its simplest form, a straight line or bar is painted midway across it: **Fig.14.1.** There are cases where there is more than one bar. Some men have a line ending in a tuft coming from the end of their penises: **Fig.14.2.** The line can be long, thin, sinuous and 'tendril-like' and end in a carefully detailed serrated, crescentic 'tuft' or 'tulip shape': on the large trancer of **Pl.10.1 above**, the long tendril curves up, passes behind both legs and hangs down well below his back. The tufted line can be attached not to the penis but to the top end of the bar. Here it can be considerably enlarged, coarsened and thickened: e.g. **Fig.12.6 above.**

The bar across the penis and the tufted line issuing from penis or bar can be seen in paintings throughout southern Africa. They have intrigued many observers and been the subject of considerable speculation. An early suggestion by Dart, who devoted so much attention to the sizes and strengths of Bushmen' penises, shows more signs of an origin in the fantasies of pubescent schoolboys rather than the mind of a renowned scientist: he wondered if the bar represented a Later Stone Age bored stone into which the penis was inserted: its ability to remain erect under the weight may have been "a test of virility in an initiation cult".[9] Breuil took it at first to illustrate infibulation.[10] This interpretation has been ponderously elaborated: Lee and Woodhouse discussed whether "its purpose was to prevent copulation in compliance with some tribal taboo" and whether it represented "a piece of stick, a hooked plug of some sort, or a porcupine quill" and pointed to a find of such a quill between the thighs of a Later Stone Age burial, omitting to add that the skeleton was that of a girl. They also wondered whether it might be "a conventionalised illustration of a fertility cult" - whatever that means. The tufted line has been interpreted by them and many others as a decorated penis sheath, noting the particularly "dressy affair" of the trancer in **Pl.10.1 above.**[11] Willcox tabulated all the occurrences reported to him from throughout southern Africa,

in terms of the sizes and colours of the figures, their equipment and apparent movements and activities.[12] But he begged the most important question when he started with the presupposition that "the idea that anything in African rock art is symbolic is pure assumption" and should be discounted and that the bar and tufted lines must be "figurative". It is scarcely surprising that his analysis was inconclusive: the nearest "figurative" equivalent he could find was a sheath - the ampallong - used in Indonesia.[13]

Breuil later suggested that the bar "might be a graphic indication of a moral prohibition on intercourse".[14] Vinnicombe agreed and related the motif to San beliefs that a hunter who has wounded an animal with a poisoned arrow must lie isolated and still, and not urinate or copulate until after the poison has worked and the animal is dead.[15] This seems plausible but is, as we shall see, untenable.

Let us attempt once again an analysis of the contexts of the motifs. Three of the five resting hunters in **Fig.8.1 above** have a line ending in an oval or a centrally thickened bar. Only five in the long lines of hunters in **Fig.8.5 above** have the emblem; the man clubbing a small animal in **Fig.8.6 above** has it. Among men taken as dancers, a single figure holding combs in **Fig.9.18 above** has the bar and the pipers in **Fig.9.20 above** all have unusual and curious three-pronged tassels in place of the tufted line. Of the few distended male figures, that shown in **Fig.11.15 above** has a tufted line on the bar and, in **Fig.11.16 above,** the smaller of the two figures has a tuft. More of the hunters of big game have the emblem but by no means all: it is given to only one figure in **Fig.12.4 above**, both hunters of the rhino in **Fig.12.6 above**, and two of the hunters of supernatural beasts in **Fig.12.13 above.** Recumbent trancers seem rarely to have it though those who incorporate ovals - which we shall see in the next chapter are the most important symbol of potency - or have them attached to their bodies all have the tufted line: **Pl.10.1 above** and **Figs.15.10 and 15.11 below.** The bar across the penis is painted on two 'spirit-figures' in **Fig.13.23 above.**

These emblems are however, by no means always on or in the position of the penis. Some emerge directly from the navel or abdomen, the gebesi that the Kung and others believe is the location of a person's potency. The large but poorly drawn man holding a hare in **Fig.7.11 above** has a line with a tasselled end coming from his waist. The figures in **Fig.15.24 below** controlling flecks - which we shall see in the next chapter represent a particular form of potency - also have long thin lines ending in blobs emerging directly from their bodies rather than penises; so do the two small 'spirit-figures' with them.

The figures so vividly illustrated transforming into birds in **Fig.13.7 above** - save for one figure on the right - are united by lines ending in a tuft emerging from the area of the navel. In **Fig.12.24 above**, containing another important scene of transformation into creatures with bird-like qualities, a figure under the elephants's belly and by another hand, has a hunting bag and holds a small pouch. His limbs are less distorted but he has the suggestion of talons, an open beak and head plumage. More importantly, he once again has a tufted tendril coming out of the area of his navel. A second and later figure, under the elephant's neck, has only this emblem and perhaps the lines of his head to suggest his relationship with the transforming figures. The same variation occurs in the transformation scene in **Fig.12.23 above**: a lean recumbent figure at the elephant's tail holds the emblem in his hand. These three compositions seem to demonstrate that at least this particular variation and placement of the tufted tendril has a close association with transformation and perhaps especially with transformation into birds.

In **Fig.13.12 above**, five of the figures with gaping jaws and tusks, one of whom has become transformed into a fearsome creature with bristles, horns and tail, have tufts attached to the bars across their penises; one other may only have a bar. (The three small figures inserted into the scene, one with wings and one carrying a bird, also have bars with tufts.) In the adjoining panel, **Fig.13.11 above**, five more

of these creatures have the same emblem but now it issues from their backs: a peculiarly bizarre variation. (Five normal men crouched below them have simple barred penises.)

Again a displacement of the tufted tendril is associated with transformation.

Lines with the same tufted ends can also hang down from the armpits, as in one of the hunters in **Fig.10.3 above.** This suggests some association with sweat and hence with potency. The tufted emblems used on heads are very similar in the details of their form to these tufts on the ends of lines, suggesting that they may designate the same or similar qualities. In at least one instance, figures hold straight lines ending in a detailed and characteristic tuft upright in their hands so that they look like arrows and indeed share a general similarity to the shapes of 'arrows of potency'. This then raises at least the possibility that all tufted forms have a relationship with potency, even perhaps arrows of potency.

The varied locations of the tufted line indicate that the emblem is not essentially related to the penis and so cannot be concerned specifically with urine, semen, taboos on intercourse or sexuality. If it represents some sort of bodily emanation, it must be one that is more generalized. Displacements of the emblem from the penis seem to correlate with transformations. Figures transforming into birds have the line transposed to their navels. Those transforming into lions have them at their backs, perhaps indicating something of the grotesque and terrifying nature of their transformation.

These emblems, though primarily concerned with one part of the human anatomy, occur so widely and patchily in the paintings that once again, it is extremely difficult to discern a pattern. However, it does seem that some association, although complex and indirect, with potency can be demonstrated. They tend to become more elaborate the more closely they are associated with trance or trancers, in other words, with the degree of activity of a person's potency. Many men do not have their sexual organs depicted. Paintings

that present male roles in more detail, depict the penis. The barred penis is shown on men with their families or hunting. The tufted tendril is found on many hunters killing large animals or with elaborate arrowheads. It occurs even more regularly in paintings of large reclining men in trance. It is almost universal on figures that are partly transformed into supernatural creatures. There is thus a distinct tendency for a progression of increasingly more complex signs attached to the penis to be associated with relatively greater frequency with people in situations in which potency is increasingly active, from hunters to symbolic kills to transformed trancers. It looks as if the bar might indicate a potency present but still latent and the tufted tendril the same potency in its more active form. However, no invariable rules can yet be established and there must therefore be other factors of which we are at present unaware.

Leaves

Four emblems - the comb, leaf, disc and whisk shapes - have already been described and associated with dancing in Chapter 9 and leaves and combs with distended figures in Chapter 11. The comb is found only in these contexts and hence has already been fully considered. The others have wider associations, though none of them is held by or attached to a gatherer, mother or trancer. In **Fig.8.2 above**, a companion of the hunter tying an arrowhead to its shaft, holds a leaf shape. In **Fig.8.3 above**, a hunter with arrows of potency, the companion of a hunter, who has a zig-zag line coming from his hand, has a leaf shape on his swollen upper arm. The wide range of emblems attached to the heads of two figures bleeding from their noses at the top of **Fig.11.4 above** include a leaf shape: the only known instance where this sign is attached to the head. At least three of the hunters in **Fig.12.8 above** have leaves on the roundels on their upper arms. Along the bottom of this composition seven hunters flee from the encounter taking place on the right: above them on the right, another eight hunters - of which two are now fragmentary - do the same: two of the lower group have plumes - curved vertical lines with a feathered edge - rather than

leaves rising from one shoulder. One of the transforming figures in **Fig.13.12 above** holds a leaf; and in **Fig.15.24 below**, one figure concerned with the control of flecks holds one and two have them attached to their arms.

Leaf shapes do not only occur singly. They are also regularly painted in pairs, joined at the base, on the chests, bellies or smalls of the back of men. They seem to be found particularly on recumbent trance figures. **Fig.14.4** shows three such figures, painted with eight crouched, crawling and falling figures and a large striding figure that is probably the earliest of the group and established the theme. The association of all these figures is made clear by twin leaf-shapes emerging from the abdomens of each one: the emblem unites them all. The large standing figure has a mane of lines down the back of his head and probably also had leaf-shapes attached to his stomach. The largest prone figure, the one imitated by the artists of the minor figures, not only has leaf-shapes at the small of his back but a barred and tufted penis, a cone on his head and the diagnostic posture of a trancer, with one knee bent, one hand on his head and the other touching his knee. A figure immediately below him is in the same position while the final prone figure - on the far left - has both legs bent and upright. Of the other falling and crawling figures, at least four have twin leaves on their chests or abdomens.

The seven figures in **Fig.14.5** may also have been painted at intervals rather than composed as a single scene. They are painted on the horizontal underside of an overhang and so no direction or verticality can be attributed to them. Four have penises and hunter's shoulder bags and three of these and one other carry short sticks: an unusual attribute in a man except in the context of dancing. All but one have their legs bent and apart in a posture associated with distended figures. Five have the twin-leaf emblem attached to their bodies and in every figure where the head is preserved, tufts or cones are attached to it. The seated figure, lower right, has not only a tuft to his head and twin leaves to his back but a round shape and a rough leaf shape on his shoulders and

a bar, to which a tuft is attached, across his penis: an extensive range of emblems are here painted on a figure that otherwise does not seem particularly distinguished. He also raises his 'stick' to his mouth and points it forward, suggesting that all the sticks in this group may be the pipes which we have suggested may be musical instruments.

Men who appear to be simply resting amongst their families in otherwise ordinary camp scenes can also have paired leaf-shapes attached to their bodies. In **Fig.8.21 above** four men have them: two standing and two recumbent. One of the latter is holding his head and with one foot on the other knee in the position associated with trance. A fifth sitting figure may have leaves attached to the top back of his chest. Yet none of the men in the camp painted above this one has them: **Fig.8.20 above.** The same shape can be seen on a figure in characteristic trance posture at the top of **Fig.10.5 above**, a falling hunter in **Fig.10.6 above** and on the figure controlling a flow of flecks in **Fig.15.24 below.**

Discs

We have already examined in Chapter 9 how discs are held by dancers or attached to their arms. Unlike leaves or combs, they are never associated with distended figures. Unlike leaves, they are never associated with hunters. However, in Chapter 13, we have seen how roundels, which to judge by the similarity of form may be a related emblem, are placed across or over the upper arm or penis of hunters of dangerous animals as well as dancers.

Three groups of paintings on two faces of a rather sparsely painted rock illustrate wider ramifications of the disc and how the same form could be used in different scenes and different contexts. As more paintings were added to the panel, it provided a unifying element or commentary on apparently disparate subjects. In **Fig.14.6** two hunters have large roundels on their penises. Next to them, the same shape sprouts from and decorates the bag of a gatherer and the head of a hunter. Both have two long aprons or tails hanging over their buttocks: an embellishment that, at least in the case of the hunter, probably represents dance apparel,

making him both hunter and dancer. The deliberate juxtapositioning of a hunter and a gatherer is most unusual, a linkage reinforced by the tails and discs. It seems that some quality shared by the two is being described, that both share in some unifying experience or situation. (Painted nearby are a man and woman with their possessions beside them. He has a tuft added to the bar across his penis. At the top is a woman with her tasselled aprons flying.)

Below this scene is **Fig.14.7**, a line of four hunters by a different artist. They all have the same pairs of tails; three have discs on their heads; and two have the same shapes hanging from the bottoms of their shoulder bags. One has a leaf attached to his shoulder, amongst his arrows.

Around the corner of the boulder, there are two more sets of paintings that may have been intended to amplify and elucidate part of the meaning of the emblem: **Fig.14.8.** A line of five women, sketched by yet another artist, all wear aprons and have additions to their heads in the shape of bifurcated tufts. They raise their hands and spread their fingers, apparently clapping, an action most frequently used by the women forming the chorus for a dance. They do not have discs attached to their bodies - no woman ever does - but above them is an unusual group of carefully painted if unidentifiable plant forms: tubers, fruits or pods. Each has a short straight stem and their shape is a strong echo of the disc shape, which suggests that they may be its counterpart in the natural world.

In this series of paintings, the same emblem is attached to the genitals, heads and bags of hunters, gatherers and dancers. Taking all these images together and placing them in the context of potency, it seems reasonable to suggest that they are all concerned with a specific form of potency inherent in, associated with or named after a particular 'disc-shaped' plant which, harnessed in dancing, affects and unites both men and women, adheres to and alters their heads, sexual organs and equipment or, putting it figuratively, fills and enriches their bags and their persons, physically as food, mentally and sexually.

It has already been proposed that leaves, combs and discs may represent musical instruments, presumably different types of rattles. This set of images would seem to suggest there was more to them than that. They may represent different species of plants or fruit which were used in or had some significant association with dancing. Paintings of people holding plants are known. Goodall has illustrated two seated figures with leaf and disc shapes on their shoulders, one of them holding a comb, and both holding what clearly seem to be large flowers.[16] One of the gatherers in **Fig.8.15 above** seems to hold a flower and she and her companion have discs attached to them. Close to the dancers of **Fig.9.14**, another artist has painted 21 objects enclosed within a roughly circular line (**Fig.15.17 below**): spheres with thin slightly curved tails that seem to be tubers and are also not unlike the disc shapes save for slight irregularities of form and the fragility of their appendages. Above them is a second group of longer, thinner tubers, not unlike the leaf shapes save for similar irregularities and their equally long and delicate stems. But these differences are to be expected between straightforward naturalistic illustration and more stylised and emblematic representation. In **Fig.9.18**, above the man holding two large comb shapes, is a group of six shapes, three long and thin and the other three rounder and with pointed ends that, by comparison with the objects that women are shown pounding and grinding in paintings like **Fig.8.16 above** can be identified as plants. And we have just seen that disc-shaped plants are painted above the chorus of clapping, aproned women in **Fig.14.8.**

If these emblems represent plants, they cannot be identified more precisely - no plants species have been identified from paintings in Zimbabwe. It could be that they were hallucinogenic, thus supporting the proposition, for which very little evidence has been produced, that some trancing was in part drug induced.[17] However, what these paintings do make clear is that all these objects were generally used or manipulated by groups of people acting together, be they dancing or not, that they were accessories

to open, public, community events, not the private or esoteric practice that taking trance-inducing drugs might suggest.

Whisks

We have established that whisks are an almost exclusively male emblem, that whisks in a hunting bag denote hunters and held in the hand or attached to the shoulders denote dancers. Unlike combs and leaves they are never attached to distended female figures but they are tied to the shoulders of the distended male figure in **Fig.11.15 above**. One small hunter with a hooped neck at the top left of **Fig.13.5 above** has two whisks rising from his bicep roundel. Another hunter, also with a hooped neck, at the bottom right, has what may be a very long-tailed whisk in the same place.

It is common to find that the same emblem is repeated in various forms in different paintings in different parts of a panel. The figure at the bottom of **Fig.14.9**, a detail of **Fig.12.26 above**, has an array of different emblems attached to him: lines and a leaf shape at his chest, discs hanging from his elbows, triangular combs in his hands and whisks on both his shoulders. The same emblem is also attached to both shoulders of the four complete members of a chorus of kneeling men above the main figure. These were not the work of one artist at one time but the line was added to progressively by different artists. They all grasp their lower chests from which lines spurt. Immediately right of the single figure in the same panel, is part of the outline of an oval shape which has been superimposed on the whole panel and has whisks attached to it. Elsewhere, discs are also attached to it. The artists seem to have been concerned to link different images together through the repeated use of the same emblems, perhaps to indicate that very different images share a single overall quality and perhaps incidentally helping to elucidate the qualities of the emblems through their different locations.

Tusks

A pair of thin curved lines can curve up from the mouths of people and different species of animals. These are rarer

than other emblems and look more dramatic: to accommodate the tusks, the mouths often gape so large and wide that they are already fearsome and scarcely human. From their orientation and shape these emblems look more like elephant tusks than a carnivore's fangs. The bleeding healer in **Fig.10.7 above** has tusks; so does his patient; so do the two bleeding men at the top of **Fig.11.4 above.** There is a suggestion of tusks on a pair of large distended female figures: **Fig.11.1 above.** One-legged figures clinging to the line coming from a distended woman, **Fig.11.18 above**, turn their heads backward and point their single white tusks upwards. The figures transforming into lions in **Figs.13.11 and 13.12 above** all have tusks.

Fig 14.10 shows four small hunters with miniature bows and arrows with lines flowing in abundance from them and their receptacles; they have tusks springing from gaping mouths. They also have barred penises and tufts and manes on their heads. Their bodies are misshapen to the extent that their legs have become thin and stick-like and their arms thick formless 'flippers'. There is a thus a strong suggestion that the potency signified by the tusks is not only transforming but is generated so prolifically that it is overflowing from many parts of the body.

Fig.14.11 shows three strange composite creatures with many of the attributes of felines and with fingers or claws on their forelegs and the suggestion of human back legs: all have tusks on both upper and lower jaws. They are superimposed on the remains of a recumbent figure.

The emblem of tusks is associated with trancers, curing, the release of potency, with distended figures and the figures which cling to the lines they generate. It seems to be particularly associated with transforming or transformed figures and hence perhaps with potency powerful enough to transform people into supernatural creatures. The full consequences of the transforming power represented by tusks is probably depicted in paintings of creatures that are almost entirely animals, like the jackal-like creature with long curved tusks amongst the sable-dancers of **Pl.9.2 above.** It retains the mane and sable markings of the human dancers

around it: a dancer almost entirely transformed. The large trancer that dominates this scene, **Pl.10.1 above**, not only has the same facial markings and mane but also lines of the characteristic tusk form on his forehead. From its form, it would seem very probable that this emblem is derived from the elephant and was thus possibly another means of representing the particular potency symbolised by the elephant.

Bands painted across animals

Two parallel white lines painted across the knees or fetlocks of many different animals form one of the commonest, strangest and hitherto entirely unnoticed emblems in the paintings. They have been recorded on kudu (**Fig.14.12**), felines which are probably hyena (**Fig.14.13**), warthog (**Fig.7.7 above**), waterbuck (**Fig.7.15 above**), crocodile (**Fig.7.19 above**), elephant (**Fig.11.8 above**), buffalo (**Pl.14.1**) and zebras.[18] A single white line sometimes extends down from the lines across the fetlocks to the outline of a white rectangle on the pasterns or hooves: **Fig.14.12**. Animals with fetlock bands frequently also have triple white lines across their necks, as in the many tsessebe in **Fig.1.1 above**. Sometimes the limbs and bodies have further white lines across them as the crocodile of **Fig.7.19 above** shows. Given that white is a pigment that does not survive nearly as well as any other, it is probable that a great many more paintings of animals bore this emblem than survive with it today and it may be that it was one of the most common devices in the art.

These lines cannot be explained in terms of natural skin or hair colorations. They are identical to the lines representing strings of beads forming bangles and necklaces painted on many human figures and which are found most commonly on dancers; the more numerous the lines the more they suggest a dancer's adornments. We know that "the making of beadwork is a Kung criterion for 'humanness'" and that Kung trance dancers wore beads "to make themselves look strong and attractive to the spirits with whom they communicate when they enter the spirit world".[19] The San

believed that very close relationships and affinities existed between humans and animals through the circumstances of their creation.[20] It would be difficult to convey this in the paintings while retaining all the animal's natural characteristics. The additions of these white bands, so like the strings of beads worn by people, might have been a solution. This supposition is strengthened by the juxtaposition in **Pl.14.1** of a buffalo with such lines on its neck, front and back legs with two hunters with identical lines on their knees and arms. It seems that, through this emblem, explicitly human attributes were given to animals, attributes that connote not only humanity but, more explicitly, a role in dancing and trancing, that they were removed from the natural world to a world where animals and humans were one. The bands may further suggest that, like humans, these animals were potent, that some animals were dancers and trancers or dancers and trancers were in some sense animals. Thus the imagery may have enabled artists to describe and explore aspects of dancing, trancing and potency in a new way, in a different dimension, through a different set of images.

Other emblems on animals

Two antelope, one possibly a kudu cow and the other a young tsessebe have carefully painted projections from their foreheads: **Fig.14.14**. The group of antelope, perhaps kudu cows, on the right of **Fig.14.15**, as carefully and precisely drawn and in the same dark pigment as the lovers and hunters above them (**Figs.7.21, 12.7 and 13.6 above**) have strange small triangular protrusions like glands where jaw meets neck, reminiscent of the equally carefully detailed navels of the hunters above them and thus perhaps bringing them into some intentional association. These may be emblems but their rarity prevents any pattern of associations being discerned. The antelope in **Fig.14.16** has what seems to be three small additional horns growing from its face that may be intended as a tusk emblem. The single curve of its body and neck gives it a curiously swollen and improbable shape and seems to indicate that it has undergone unnatural change.

Interpretation

It is not yet possible to define precisely or comprehensively the way the system of emblems operated or to penetrate their exact significance. At best, we have the beginnings of a general understanding, some general propositions. The great majority of emblems are associated with people but the same emblems may be attached to humans, animals, equipment and non-figurative oval shapes. Emblems can serve as connecting links between very disparate images in panels of paintings. They suggest some sort of similarity of content in otherwise very different objects.

Some of the emblems that we have classified as different may have had the same overall significance, shown by their shared basic forms; this may then have been qualified according to the part of the body to which they were attached. Disc shapes may have the same significance whether they were held in the hand, suspended from the elbow, attached to the shoulder or superimposed on biceps or penis. Tufted emblems may have denoted the same basic quality, qualified according to whether the tuft was attached to crown, armpit, navel or penis or held in the hand.

Some emblems - particularly those attached to the head - are mutually exclusive: large triangles and small tufts are never shown together on a persons' head. This suggests that some emblems with apparently different forms also might have denoted the same quality and that hence the use of more than one would be superfluous.

Most emblems are not mutually exclusive: a man may have a whole array of different emblems attached to different parts of his body. Parents may have different emblems or the same emblems attached to them, while children never have any at all. This demonstrates that emblems are not totemic, for in a totemic system parents do not normally share the same totem and children take the totem of one of their parents. Emblems cannot be badges of different clans, castes, associations or age-grades: membership of any one of these generally excludes membership of any other. Emblems are not exclusively associated with and hence do not define

particular activities: some emblems, notably the leaf, can occur in a wide range of different circumstances - in hunting, dancing, trancing and domestic scenes. They define qualities that cut across the limited range of social roles with which the art is primarily concerned but, with few exceptions, do not cut across the sexes.

There are no exclusively female emblems but many are only painted on men. The additions to the penis are obviously and necessarily such; they have no female equivalent. Discs, whisks and the pairs of leaves on the torso are equally exclusive. The mane is not only almost exclusively male but strongly correlated with hunters. Tusks are similarly almost all on men and seem particularly related to transformed beings: the only exceptions are the manes and possibly tusks on female figures with distended abdomens. Triangles and tufts on the head are the emblems most commonly placed on women but they are found at least as frequently on men. Those emblems associated with men are less definitions of gender that indicators of predominantly masculine qualities. This is further indication that they may be concerned with potency for, amongst the Kung at least, various forms of potency are very much more frequently harnessed, activated and exploited by men.[21]

Emblems make visual references to reality. It is probable that some may have been derived from musical instruments, others from hunting, dancing, trancing or curing equipment, others from animals, others from plants, others from actual physical emissions from different parts of the body like sweat or blood, others perhaps from sensations experienced in trance. Fly whisks appear almost direct illustrations. Tusks may refer almost as directly to elephants. Discs, combs and single leaves may represent plants, possibly adapted to make rattles used in dancing. Leaf shapes attached in pairs to a man's chest could conceivably make some reference to a woman's breasts. Additions to the armpits, penis, navels and stomachs may refer to body fluids.

Given that the imagery was so concerned with

generalization, it seems a contradiction that so many emblems were used to qualify images. An explanation can be suggested. The primary concern of the art was to present people as social beings. The essence of a person's social and economic being was relatively easy to describe visually, through tools, weapons, equipment, clothing and postures. All of these had an immediate and obvious correspondence with palpable reality, with what could be seen around everyday. However, given San beliefs that the natural and supernatural spheres were indivisible and that each permeated the other, and their beliefs in the pervasive presence of personal potency, and given the concern in the paintings with expressing the essential elements of humanity, it might be expected that the art might pay a great deal of attention to establishing and defining the metaphysical capabilities and roles of people as well as their social and economic responsibilities, more so because their spiritual capacities were of the essence of people as social beings. Many San conceived of themselves as more individual in their supernatural capacities than in their social roles. The Xam recognized "four overlapping categories" of trancers, those concerned with rain, game, illness and those without such specific capacities.[22] In Kung hunting-gathering groups, all the men hunted and all women gathered but only about half the men and a tenth of the women developed the will and energy to activate and use their supernatural potential and trance.[23] There was also a great variety of different sorts of potency, activated by different dances and songs, in different circumstances and associated in an elusive way with different animals and plants. There were also different degrees of potency, controlled and uncontrolled, dormant, active and transforming. There was strong and weak potency, good and bad, social and antisocial, malevolent, harmful, deathly, creative or healing, num and now.[24] Trancers were in a sense the only specialists in San society.

Supernatural qualities were, of their nature, mysterious, ill-defined and invisible: concepts embedded in belief rather than percepts derived from reality. They were

correspondingly more difficult to depict. The structure of the art already suggests that aspects of potency will not be represented by simple illustrations of what happens or what particular people did in particular circumstances. It will rarely illustrate in detail activities associated with potency such as curing, influencing game, rainmaking or travelling as spirits. Rather, we are likely to find that figures will be given a prescribed and limited range of attributes that signify particular supernatural qualities. The relationship between visual image and concepts of spiritual power could only be largely indirect and conventional. These are difficult for someone outside the culture to recognise, understand or interpret. In so far as emblems refer to or symbolise metaphysical qualities, their significance can only be teased out from the patterns of their associations and contexts.

If the paintings were concerned with depicting potency, it is probable that there is, for us, a difficult, incompletely and imperfectly understood 'sub-text' to all the paintings that is concerned with describing various aspects of it. It was perhaps a dominant theme of the paintings and one that was readily comprehensible to the original audience but is not to us. What seem to us to be realistic representations of ordinary people in ordinary situations may on one level be just that but they were painted by San artists within a San system of beliefs for a San audience. They are therefore likely to use San modes of description to carry information about San metaphysics.

NOTES

1. An early version of this chapter has been published: Garlake, 1990.

2. This is one area where systematic statistical analysis may reveal consistent patterns and correlations. This would demand detailed analysis of all the possible relationships of the attributes: things very difficult to define, establish or quantify. A large sample would have to be considered, because many emblems occur in situations only rarely depicted and, even in these, some were only rarely used. Any such analysis would also have to include all images without emblems attached to them for this provides 'negative

evidence' as significant for interpretation as the 'positive evidence'. Such analysis has not yet been attempted.

3. Dornan, 1925: 83.

4. Willcox, 1988.

5. Stow, 1905: 71. See also Willcox, 1988.

6. Huffman, 1983: 50.

7. Bleek, 1932a: 23; 1935: 2.

8. Bleek, 1932a: 57.

9. Dart, 1929: .

10. Breuil, 1948: 6-7.

11. Lee and Woodhouse, 1970: 65-6, 79.

12. Willcox, 1978a.

13. See Harrison, T. 1956. 'Rhinoceros in Borneo: and traded to China', Sarawak Mus. J., 7, 263-74, for a discussion of the palang as this device is more correctly called.

14. Breuil, personal communication to Willcox, in Willcox, 1972: 89.

15. Vinnicombe, 1976: 258-9.

16. Goodall, 1959: 90, Fig.24.

17. Burrett, 1990.

18. Similar lines but in a dark paint have been illustrated on a painting of eland in the Drakensberg and interpreted as bindings: Vinnicombe, 1976: 183, 190, 191; 1983: cover and inside cover. This has no relevance to the Zimbabwean images, where the lines certainly do not bind the legs together, cross between them or attach one leg to the other: the legs are clearly able to move entirely freely.

19. Dowson, 1989: 85, quoting personal communications from Biesele and Wiessner.

20. Hewitt, 1976: Chs.2 and 5; Silberbauer, 1981: 64-9; Guenther, 1989: 31.

21. Katz, 1982: 97.

22. Lewis-Williams, 1981a: 77.

23. Katz, 1982: 44, 97; Lewis-Williams, 1982: 434.

24. Marshall, 1957 and 1962.

15. OVAL DESIGNS, DOTS AND FLECKS [1]

There are many hundreds of paintings in Zimbabwe of simple regular ovoid shapes. These also form the basis of more complex designs with a common set of elements composed in clearly defined ways. Each oval generally has a dark rectangular core with white semicircular caps at both ends. Parallel lines of white dots were carefully spaced across the cores, either in limited bands or panels or more often covering the entire surface of these cores. Dark dots sometimes covered the white caps. Ovals of various sizes were arranged in horizontal or vertical rows. Their shapes could be adjusted to fit round pre-existing elements; often their bases curve symmetrically inward to fit them within an overall circular area. Occasionally they were enclosed in a circular outline which was sometimes serrated along its outer edge. Compositions often grew over time as more and more ovals were added round the original designs.

Along the bottom of **Fig.1.1 above**, there are three separate paintings of these shapes and more ovals are clustered round the legs of the large beast on the right. **Fig.1.3 above** is a composition based on oval shapes, so large that it covers almost half of the cave wall and is comparable in size to all the rest of the panel of paintings taken together. In **Fig.1.4 above**, an oval design lies horizontally beside the hunters, top right.

These designs dominate the art of Zimbabwe through their size, complexity and frequency. Once their elements are identified, it becomes apparent how abundant these designs are. They can usually be found somewhere in almost every panel of paintings. Some large caves have dozens of large oval compositions painted on their walls, exhibiting every possible variation and elaboration of the essential theme. No single subject, motif or composition is a more important component of the art. Its significance must have been correspondingly great. The way this design is interpreted almost becomes a touchstone through which to assess the attitudes behind interpretations of the art. If any single

motif holds a key to understanding the art of Zimbabwe, it is the oval design.

Examples in detail

In a single large cave in the far north of Mashonaland, there is the most varied, complex, colourful and detailed set of these compositions. Of the four at the right of the cave (**Pl.15.1**), the largest, on the left, has five large horizontal ovoids in a rich orange ochre (**Pl.15.2**). Their cores are rectangles with slightly curved ends, set in parallel, close beside one another and originally patterned with straight lines of white dots. Each is outlined in white and the outline thickened and extended at one end to form a cap and enlarged at the other to form a uniform white field. The shapes are enclosed in a roughly circular ochre outline, with a small protruding opening at one side and with triangular protrusions, spikes or serrations around the outside edge. Smaller ochre cores outlined in white are set at each side of the main set and each side of the opening to fill much of the enclosed space. In the remaining space, small forms, each made up of three lines coming to a point, which look like our convention for an arrowhead or small and highly stylised flying birds, fill some of the interstices between the shapes and emerge from the opening, pointing in every direction. The second design (**Pl.15.1, left; Pl.15.2**) has the same spiked enclosing line with an opening and arrow shapes going in and out and clustered immediately within it. There are six ovoid forms within, each with a dark core, white surround, white semicircular caps and covered with a regular pattern of white dots. The outer oval shapes are slightly curved to fit within the enclosing line. A third design (**Pl.15.1, right; Pl.15.3**) has three horizontal ovoids, the dark cores capped and patterned in white, and no enclosing outline. The last of these designs (**Pl.15.1, extreme right; detail on extreme right of Fig. 15.3**) has four or five dark cores set vertically within a similar spiked circle. There are distinct and separate caps to each core with the cap at the top much thicker than that at the bottom. A much smaller capped oval is fitted on one side. What

appears, on comparison with other paintings, to be a plant or bulb is set between two of the ovoids. White arrow-shapes again fill the gaps between the ovals. Also within the enclosure are two tsessebe calves.

At the other side of the cave there are five paintings which are clearly derived from these designs but reduced to a much simpler form (**Pls.15.4 and 15.5**). The oval shapes are omitted. The enclosing circles are spiked round their outer edges in two examples, the spikes reduced to short straight lines in a further two and omitted in the last. The arrowhead shapes are reduced to flecks and fill the circles, overflow across the enclosing line and stream across the cave wall.

Little over 20 miles away is a large overhang with many more of these designs. **Fig.15.1** is very similar to the large designs in the cave. Six horizontal ovals, once covered in white dots, lie within an enclosing line with a funnel-shaped opening. The space between the ovals and their enclosure is filled with white arrow-shapes, the outer lines of which are sufficiently curved to suggest the wings of flying, swallow-like birds, an interpretation that is strengthened by the two clear white birds perched on branches of a tree beside the entrance to the enclosure. At the bottom left of the design is a smaller, earlier design with two oval elements simply composed of dots.

In **Fig.15.2**, in the same panel of paintings, the dark outer enclosing line extends into the interstices between the caps of the ovals. Randomly placed white dots covered the cores and dark dots the white caps. In at least two cases, the tops of the cores have sets of parallel curved lines rather than dots around them. The caps are extended by two complete detached white ovals, shaped to fill the space within the enclosure.

Fig.15.3 was painted in almost complete isolation under an overhang close to the main panel of paintings containing **Figs.15.1 and 15.2.** It is a more rigid, symmetrical and geometric composition. The enclosure is a very regular oval with large points along the top. The cores are narrowed at

their centres and have almost entirely lost their basic oval shape. The caps are unusually long: each one is as large as a core. Both cores and caps are covered in regular lines of dots in contrasting colours.

At another end of the country, in a Matopos cave, is the largest and most dramatic composition based on ovals (**Pl.15.6**). In size, position, complexity and variety of colour, it is the most dominant of all the paintings in the cave. Sixteen rectangular cores in ochres coloured from dark red through brown to light pink are set vertically in a long line. Some cores are divided into squares of different shades. Each has white caps at both ends. Further caps have been added above and below these, giving the effect of a massed, overlapping and receding array of ovals. Two further ovals with very dark cores and thick white surrounds extending into elongate white top caps were added at the top left corner, the smaller attached to the larger by a dark line (**Pl.15.7**). Within this line are the upper parts of two human figures with white faces and rigid arms stretching down and appearing to hold onto the caps. The face of a 'spirit figure' (on the extreme right of **Pl.15.7**), with long ears bent forward and white facial markings, faces the viewer over the top of one core. A small animal (on the extreme right of **Pl.15.6**) surmounts one cap, a leg extended down each side of the cap and clearly designed to fit across the cap. Three giraffe and a small bichrome antelope have been painted over the main design. This great design was not painted as a single composition. Ovals have been added progressively at both sides and more and more caps painted along the top and bottom.

In another cave in the same area, the design is simpler, faded, less colourful and less dramatic but still the dominant feature of the paintings (**Pl.15.8**).[2] It has nine vertical elements with cores and caps. Some caps are a pale ochre, some now reduced to a grey colour but probably originally a pure white. Cores vary in length, colour and patterning. One is covered in lines of darker dots, one partially covered in an L-shaped field of dots. Some of the

caps are darker than their cores and they, rather than the cores, are patterned with dots. One cap is partially covered with a grid of fine lines. In others, lines of dots form bands separating cores and caps. Immediately below this design is an extremely thin, formless and elongated human figure, lying extended and horizontal and holding its head, apparently stretched and distorted to emphasise the sensations of trance.

Variations

The oval designs at these four sites demonstrate the richness and variety of the designs and how their elements may be combined, altered, simplified, moved around and conflated while retaining an essential uniformity. There are many variations of the design. The enclosing circle is only infrequently shown. Sometimes it took the form of multiple lines surrounding a lenticular area in which the oval nested, with the lines flaring out at one end in a tuft, giving the whole composition a resemblance to a plant form, reminiscent of a bulb or tuber: see **Fig.12.14** above. The caps are often incorporated in the core to give the characteristic simple oval shape: **Fig.15.4** includes four separate designs with the cores reduced to simple monochrome shapes, either oval where there were never distinct caps or rectangles where the white caps have disappeared. These are the simplest and probably the commonest designs. The cores are often broken into a series of light and dark rectangles. If this happens and the paintings are in a single colour, the light rectangles can be filled with dots: **Fig.15.5**. This monochrome, 'chequer board' is in essence nine vertical ovals, whose cores were made up of alternate squares of solid colour and lines of dots or, on the left, composed entirely of lines of dots. In one of its simplest forms, the design can consist of no more than the outline of a rectangle filled with a lattice of criss-crossed white lines or with dark dots: **Fig.15.6** is just a cluster of dots between two vertical lines. In another common variation, the ovals, set vertically, all curve inwards towards the base, sometimes slightly reminiscent of the petals of a flower: **Fig.15.7**. All these variations can occur

in close proximity: **Figs.15.4-7** are all within a few feet of each other on the same rock face.

Where there are what look like receding ranks of caps, those which seem behind or further away from the dark cores can be dark to stand out from their white neighbours: e.g. in **Figs.15.1 and 15.8**. The latter is the sole painting under a small overhang, save for two faded earlier paintings of kudu. It can seem particularly puzzling until its basis within the formula for oval compositions is recognized. With some of its colouring faded and all traces of the white pigment that probably originally ornamented it now vanished, it has a core of narrow, strongly curved ovoids. More regular ovals nest against the curved shapes. Further ovals, including a long monochrome oval on the left, were added round the centre and curved to fit against the earlier shapes. Of two large ovals on the right of the composition, one has a light top cap and the other a dark one while the cores are made up of alternate segments of light and dark pigment. The gap between the cap of the inner oval and that of a third oval on its left is filled with dark pigment which is all that now remains to delineate the original caps. The colouring of oval designs can thus be reversed with dark caps on light cores or the interstices between the caps filled with a dark pigment.

The design system may have been sufficiently flexible to include the two strange little paintings in **Fig.15.9**: sets of vertical lines, in one case with thickened ends, that are progressively given greater curvatures so that the spaces between them are roughly oval and their overall shape begins to approximate to a circle.

Oval designs form the background to many panels of paintings: in **Fig.12.26 above** only parts of the curved outlines of large ovals now remain but these stretch across the entire rock face, decorated with lines, whisks and disc-shapes. **Fig.12.24 above** shows how the designs could be adapted to meet exigencies created by a growing composition. The original design was probably a series of dark vertical oval shapes curving inwards at the base: elements that have been so abraded that they have almost disappeared. Its white

outlines, caps and patterns of dots were repeatedly renewed through to the latest stage in the development of the panel. Around the central elements, further ovoids were added, some dark, some with light caps, some comparatively small, simple and regular in shape, others curved along their main axis and distorted to fit round the edges of the earlier shapes. The composition was progressively enlarged so that it remained the field for more and more paintings of animals and humans. The compositions were capable of almost unrestricted development, extension and variation based on the massing, clustering and multiplication of ovals. As ovals were added, they became more irregular, responding to the earlier elements, nesting against and within them and curving round them, yet never departing from the basic theme or losing the basic form. They grew in response to existing designs and not to the demands of illustration. Painterly imperatives helped to determine their sizes and shapes: a conclusive demonstration that these images, alone in the art, had almost entirely discarded any origins they may have had in mimetic illustration.

Associations with human figures

Given their apparently largely non-figurative nature, oval designs can only be interpreted through an analysis of the contexts in which they occur and of the images associated with them. The most important and clearest association is with human beings and especially with the archetype of the male trancer. The recumbent elongated trancer placed below the large composition of ovals of **Pl.15.8** has already been noticed. This juxtaposition could be coincidental. However many other paintings show this relationship more clearly and explicitly and confirm that it was intentional and significant.

The large, elaborate figure of a recumbent trancer in **Pl.10.1 above** has already been discussed in terms of the emblems attached to his body denoting various different forms of potency. The white stripes and circles on his face associate him with the sable antelope and with the numerous small dancers depicted below him whose faces are decorated in

the same way. What we can now recognize as a characteristic large oval shape has been carefully and deliberately attached to the small of his back or his abdomen. It is covered with the pattern of regular lines of white dots that are a characteristic feature of oval designs. The close identification between the trancer and this oval is established by the fact that his entire body is also covered with the same distinctive pattern of dots. This repetition suggests more than an association between the two images: there is a complete identification of trancer and oval. In some sense the trancer is an extension of the oval or the oval represents the essence of the trancer made visible. The smaller dark monochrome figure below him, by another and later artist, reinforces the message of the main figure, echoes his posture and hence is also identifiable as a trancer. Its body is partly covered and obscured by several horizontal oval shapes, reiterating once more but in a different way the association of oval and trancers established by the main figure.

The association of ovals and trancers is seldom so striking. The large hunter in **Fig.15.10**, sprawled face down with his equipment beside him, cannot be immediately identified as a trancer because he has not got the characteristic control of his body; however he has the double tails of a dancer and shares with the great trancer of **Pl.10.1** a long tufted line, now replacing his penis, and a smaller attendant: a woman kneels near him as two small figures sit beside the great trancer. A roughly oval shape has been left unpainted in the area of his abdomen and an oval of the same shape has again been painted at his back near his stomach, suggesting that the oval design and the trancer's stomach have a close association; that the abdomen is the proper seat of the oval.

In **Fig.15.11** an oval shape is outlined to form the entire body of a man. Legs, tufted penis and very rudimentary arms and head have been added to the outline. This image suggests that oval and man share the same powers and significance.

In **Fig.10.3 above**, a recumbent trancer has a small carefully delineated rectangle left unpainted in his chest. An oval shape below him also has a rectangle of the same size and shape deliberately and carefully left unpainted. The same device placed in these two different images serves to establish the close association between trancer and oval.

In **Fig.13.19 above**, a one-legged figure with long pointed ears and the eyes of a mantis and thus with allusions to supernatural beings, both spirits and gods, has a distinct oval shape clearly incorporated within its body, in the front of its torso.

In **Pl.15.9** an elaborate design in different colours based on a set of horizontal and vertical oval shapes has a large figure standing beside it. The form and colours of its misshapen, distended body echo the shape of the ovals. This strong and deliberate similarity seems to assert not only the identical nature of the two subjects but perhaps indicate that the figure is in some sense transforming into an oval design.

The range of associations between trancers and ovals all seem to establish various forms of equivalence between them, expressed in different ways: by simple juxtaposition; by superimposing scenes with trance features on ovals; by placing the same sign on both trancer and oval; by attaching emblems of trance to the ovals; by attaching ovals to the trancer's body; by extracting ovals from his body; by showing stages in which a person transforms into an oval; and by forming composite images in which ovals are given human appendages.

It is not possible to be as precise about the associations between the ovals and figures of **Fig.15.12.** Recumbent figures of both sexes are all in the same ochre pigment, all outlined in white and almost certainly all painted by the same artist at the same time. They all lie on their backs with legs and arms raised though not in postures associated with trance. They can be divided into four groups: two women and a man or child below their hide blanket, top centre; three women to the left and slightly

below them; a man and woman and a man, woman and child together, below and to the left again; and, separate from the others on the left, a man and three women. They are in no obvious arrangement of couples or families and have no possessions with them. Four women in the same colours and by the same artist, extreme top right, dance beside them in a tight line, with bent legs, leaning forwards and pushing their buttocks back. They might bring all the figures into the realm of dance or the effects of dancing. The group on the far left is carefully and deliberately placed over an oval area outlined by three lines originally decorated with dark dots. Beside and below them all are six groups of the simplest monochrome ovals or cores of ovals of very different sizes and in different pigments. The juxtapositioning and superpositioning of these figures and ovals indicate that conceptual connections existed between them.

Fig.10.8 above shows the tops of a line of oval shapes outlined with two parallel white lines. Two figures quite clearly sit on the ovals and probably hold them. With their large ears and muzzles and thin fleshless limbs, these figures are distinctive 'spirit figures'. Two straight lines flow down from both their faces representing, as we have already established, the bleeding that is an effect of trancing. These bleeding spirit figures thus provide a further link between oval forms and supernatural phenomena. This association is strengthened by two other figures, by different artists in different pigments. One shows a woman crouched with one arm bent up and the other behind her, a characteristic dance posture. The other is a man, twisted and upside down, perhaps 'somersaulting' as dancers may do as they experience the spasms associated with entering trance.

Many oval designs form a background to what seem at least at first to be mundane aspects of human affairs. In **Fig.8.19 above**, a single large oval design has, superimposed on it, a group of mothers and children, surrounded by their possessions: an archetypal domestic scene of families in camp. However, several of the women hold their heads, an attribute of trancing.

Men are shown in a separate scene on an adjacent boulder, **Fig.12.12 above**, hunting a large bovid-like creature: we have already recognized the act and the animal as symbols of potency and its release. Beside the hunters is a monochrome shape, painted with a broad brush or with the fingers, incompletely filled in, with a curved outline, a narrow base and a broad indented top. It is a small, simple, coarse image but its shape is reminiscent of an oval design. A similar design was placed beside the elephant hunt of **Fig.12.1 above**. Another was painted at the bottom of the array of animals united by the decorated outlines of ovals in **Fig.12.26 below**. Perhaps even the tree-like form in broad brush strokes in the buffalo hunt of **Fig.12.10 above** has the same connotations. These paintings may suggest that there was another variation of the oval - a single simple shape painted in one colour with rough thick brush strokes, that do not cover its surface - that had specific associations with trance-hunting. The coarse residual forms of these hunting-ovals may even suggest that the significance of the ovals has been almost entirely transferred to the much more complex imagery of the act of killing. Considering the deliberate juxtaposition and contrast between the women in camp and the men hunting in **Figs.8.9 and 12.12**, one might go further and associate the large oval design with women and family in contrast to the small rough designs associated with symbolic hunting.

Conflations of animals and ovals

Pl.15.10, a faint painting high on the wall of one of the largest painted caves in eastern Mashonaland, shows a very large creature in a pale yellow ochre, outlined in a darker colour, with heavy body and feet.[3] It is now too weathered, particularly at its head, for it to be identified with certainty, but almost certainly it is a rhino or an elephant and probably the latter, for a trunk seems just discernible. Its back is formed by a series of very regular semicircles, outlined in the same dark pigment and immediately recognizable as the characteristic caps of ovals. This image thus conflates two of the most significant images in the art:

the oval composition and the great creature, particularly the elephant, whose death equates with trance. This image is neither elephant nor oval: key and diagnostic elements of both are conflated in a single new and mysterious composite image. This suggests dramatically that the essences and powers conveyed by both these subjects are closely similar or identical.

After seeing **Pl.15.10**, it becomes apparent that this image is reproduced on a much smaller scale and in a simplified form in many small paintings of creatures based on or developing from the elephant, with trunks, large ears and sometimes tusks, but also all with heavily indented or serrated backs: **Figs.15.13-15.** All are rigid and malformed and have only single complete forelegs and hind legs: the other legs are rudimentary or absent. The creature in **Fig.15.13** appears to bleed or rather generate flows of flecks like hunted elephants. Only through the comparison with larger and more carefully and precisely detailed image of **Pl.15.12** can the connection be established between the serrations on the backs of these creatures and the cusps or caps of the oval designs.

The same association of elephant and oval may be expressed much more crudely and uncertainly in **Pl.15.11:** a later artist has painted an unusual set of apparently meandering lines near and over a small elephant, the only painting of this animal in a large painted cave. The lines are however not formless but crude abstractions of the cusps of a series of caps of ovals.[4]

There are further ways that oval designs and elephants or elephant-like creatures were linked. In **Fig.12.24 above,** the oval design has the large outline of an elephant painted over most of it. At successive stages, they have both formed the background to the diverse human and animal figures of the panel. This superpositioning is yet another form of association that also suggests that ovals and elephant incorporate the same concepts sufficiently closely that the one can replace the other.[5]

Other paintings conflate ovals with other animal

elements. **Fig.15.16** shows a creature, one of a pair, with a broad body, two heavy elephant-like legs, long thin neck, long pointed trunk-like nose or beak, ears like an antelope and no forelegs or arms. Two sets of parallel white lines emerge from its chest. It has a line of very regular curved semicircular cusps, outlined in white, along its back which are readily recognizable as the caps of ovals. The lines coming from its chest are reminiscent of the dots that flow from and surround the elephant-like creatures with serrated backs.

Long serpent-like creatures with the heads and ears of antelope are a rare but important and striking feature of the paintings (see **Fig.10.4 above** where the zig-zag line rising from the trancer changes into such a creature). Hall was the first to illustrate one - from the Matopo Hills - and his example has its back formed by the cusps of a line of caps of ovals.[6] The largest of these creatures, also in the Matopos, lies extended over 4m, **Pl.15.12.** Its belly is a straight line but its back undulates considerably to form what many have called 'hills'. Along these hills, several small human figures stand, sit, crouch or crawl holding onto them. The latter in particular - lean, angular and with only one leg - are very closely similar to the figures attached to the line which turns into an antelope-headed serpent in **Fig.10.4 above** and to those on lines that emerge from figures with distended abdomens (e.g. **Fig.11.18**). Particularly with the Hall example in mind, it seems apparent that the shape of the creature's back is once again intended to represent the top cusps of a series of ovals. This impressive painting thus brings the animal-headed serpent into the sphere of the oval designs and the distended figures and invest yet another powerful composite symbol with diverse allusions.

Beside these conflations, there are other associations between ovals and animals. In the magnificent design of **Pl.15.6**, a small antelope has been fitted round one of the caps of the ovals. Its association with an oval composition is similar to but less striking and certain than one in **Pl.15.13.**[7] Here, a large painting of a hoofed animal, most

closely resembling an antelope and with the lop ears of a tsessebe calf but not depicting any identifiable species, has its single straight foreleg inserted in the gap between two of a series of six or seven vertical oval shapes. Its single back leg fits down the side of the oval composition. Animal and ovals are carefully integrated into a single composition and the shapes of both adapted to knit together and fill the space between them. Immediately to the right is another large oval composition, **Pl.16.14.**

Previous interpretations

All previous attempts at interpreting oval designs have been based on very partial knowledge of them. No-one else has attempted a comparative analysis of the elements that go to make them up or the variations possible within them. Those committed to interpreting the art solely in terms of realistic representation have turned to the Zimbabwe landscape as the source of subject matter. Hall saw all of the few he knew as illustrations of the Victoria Falls.[8] Many have found the oval shapes most reminiscent of the groups of rounded granite boulders piled against and on top of one another and separated by narrow weathered cracks that are such a distinctive feature of much of the granite country. Hence Goodall interpreted them as representing "rock motives (sic)" or the "massing of built up rocks".[9] Others have interpreted the white caps as clouds; the dark cores as villages - with the enclosing line as a stockade round the village:[10] or the whole design as "an aerial view of cultivated lands seen by the painters".[11] An attempt to establish oval designs as "symbols of objects or activities from hunter-gatherer life" proposes that they were a "spatial or geographic motif" that formed "metaphorical maps". It then goes on to explore the "social value of space", "symbolic differentiation of space" and "appropriation of topologized space" amongst the San.[12]

Within the same premise - that all the paintings were attempts at realistic illustration - most recent interpretations of the oval designs see them as bees' nests. It had already been asserted that "African observers all

consider" the designs in **Pls.15.1-5** to be "paintings of bark beehives with the insects flying in and out of the entrances"; however no evidence was produced to support this or to indicate the strength of the belief, its basis or origins.[13] There was thus no reason to give it any more weight than any other recent ad hoc interpretations. The idea was developed by Pager from comparisons of a few selected reproductions of copies of oval designs in Zimbabwe - especially those of **Pls.15.1-5** - with paintings in the Drakensberg.[14] The interpretation of the latter - there are extremely few of them - as bees' nests looks reasonable, for some of them appear to show the insects in some detail and some show people who appear to be climbing ladders towards the nests.

In the most detailed and authoritative exposition, the dark cores are taken as cells filled with honey or brood, the caps as empty cells, and the patterns of dots superimposed on the cores as larvae.[15] The enclosing outlines have been interpreted as representing a section cut through a nest made either in a tree trunk or in a traditional Shona beehive made of a cylinder of bark or even in a gourd. The serrations round the circle have even been taken to establish that the bark used to make the hives came from a particular species of acacia.[16] The different shapes and orientations of the ovals were held to represent different forms of nests made by different species of bees. The arrow shapes and stippling are the bees themselves. Any anomalies were dismissed by claiming that "the nature and purpose of these [designs] was so well known to the ancient viewers of this art that no further visual explanations were added by the painters".[17] To support this interpretation and establish its significance within a San context, much has been made of San beliefs in the supernatural strength and potency of honey and its exploitation by trancers to strengthen their own potency and assist them to induce trance.[18]

However, the proponents of this thesis were and are all entirely unaware of the number, range and variety of these designs in Zimbabwe, of the components of the designs or the

many different ways they were arranged: the essential elements of the Zimbabwe designs simply do not occur in the South African paintings and the two are scarcely comparable.

All these explanations ultimately rely on the presupposition that the oval designs aimed to reproduce a natural reality as accurately as the artists were able. They take no account of the conventions of the art which demanded that every object was depicted from a single composite set of viewpoints that described each element of the object in the most easily legible way. If they represent bees' nests, the varying forms of the oval designs presuppose that, in different paintings, the artists painted the nests from several different angles: from the side in the sets of vertical ovals, from the bottom for the horizontal ovals, in cross-section in the case of the enclosing bark hives and, in the South African paintings, through a hole near the bottom of the nest so that the combs appear as concentric semicircular lines. This apparently free choice of varied viewpoints to depict one particular object is a contradiction of the rigid rules that determined a single mode of representation for every other subject in the art.

Reinterpretation

The process of elaboration and variation in the oval designs was not disciplined by the necessities of realistic reproduction or to increase resemblances. Some elements within them may have been embellished for largely aesthetic reasons: certainly some are strikingly beautiful. Though they seem to have little obvious reference to the natural world, any suggestion that the designs are purely decorative patterns can be dismissed. The art of its very essence always had a figurative basis; none is simply geometric or decorative patterning.

The ovals have already been established as in some sense equivalents of trancers, of elephants, of animal-headed serpents and of the lines emitted from distended people. They must therefore share similar powers with all of these and the common power can only be that of potency. The contexts of the ovals thus suggest they are primarily

concerned with potency.

The oval designs also have some representational content. It is a dangerous operation for us, so far removed from the artists in time, culture and beliefs, to venture too far into trying to discern the iconic basis of what is essentially an imagery of the mind, of concepts and beliefs. Nevertheless an attempt to understand more of the possible connotations inherent in the oval designs may be useful at least in conveying some sense of the expressive force of this imagery.

Details of known San beliefs about potency have some direct visual correspondences to many details of the oval designs. Potency is said by the Kung to reside and have its source in the gebesi, the general region of the abdomen or stomach [19]: hence the ovals attached to trancers' stomachs and hence paintings with the belly left blank and an oval of the same shape placed next to it. If the circles enclosing oval designs represent the stomach of a trancer - and some seem to have close formal correspondences to the shape of a stomach and even have tube-like orifices, as in **Fig.15.1** - the serrations or spikes round the outside of the circles may represent the sensations of pricking and stinging experienced in this area as potency is activated.[20] The arrowheads flowing in and out of the enclosures can be seen as potency itself, as alluding to the sensations experienced as potency becomes active or as the 'arrows of potency' inserted into the abdomen in trance.[21] The oval and particularly its cores become the source of potency, where potency resides. Such an interpretation makes the ovals the generators and source of potency within the body, the gebesi. The lines of dots within the cores of the ovals - within the gebesi - can then be read as latent potency prior to its activation or release. Flecks, dashes or 'arrowheads' streaming out of the ovals then become potency that has 'boiled over', become active and been released.[22]

Potency can take over and possess a trancer's entire body: hence the figures whose bodies are shaped like an oval.[23] Trancers are transformed by their potency: hence

the bodies so misshapen that they resemble oval designs. A trancer can use his potency as a powerful influence over animals and their movements; he may also use it in rain-making, to capture 'rain animals' and lead them to the lands that need rain and induce them to spill their rain there: either or both may explain the large animal trapped between a line of ovals. Potency may diminish people and animals and link the world of man and spirits: hence the small unreal figures attached to oval designs. Different forms of potency exist: hence perhaps the different forms of ovals, the different patterns painted on them and in particular the small coarse variants that are associated with symbolic hunts. Potency is primarily a human power but one that is found also in some plants: hence the ovals that form animal bodies and lie at the cores of plant-like growths. Potency permeates life and forms the pervasive background to it: hence the many scenes of human activity deliberately superimposed on oval designs and hence the way that large and complex oval designs grow with the panels of paintings as both are added to in unison and grow together.

Potency is only useful and beneficial when it is controlled. Uncontrolled potency is dangerous and harmful. The overall effect of the oval designs is one of order, exemplified by the lines of identical, symmetrical, simple shapes and reinforced by the careful lines and regular grids of dots that fill them. All this contrasts with the disordered lines and waves of dashes that can emerge from the ovals: a powerful visual parallel between order and disorder that exactly reflects concepts of controlled and free, even disordered potency.

The oval design is more than individual potency. The proper use of potency is a cooperative act that involves the whole community.[24] The ranks of vertical ovals, depicted in particularly beautiful and dramatic form in the huge composition of **Pl.15.6**, with more and more pale coloured and white caps added behind and above the caps of the front rank of ovals, suggest a receding host of ovals in massive array. This powerful image conveys the strength of the community,

the essence of the communal dance in which individual and community merge: the one part of the other, encouraged, supported and strengthened by it and serving it. The ranks of ovals become a symbol of the community of trancers, the community as a whole, replete with potency, pervaded and transformed by it.

The oval designs are graphic representations of, abstractions of, and combinations of, many different but essential elements in San belief. They retain, at the same time, some iconic references. These may include parts of the body and the sensations of trance, the harmony, order and control of trance energies and of potency, the dancer, the trancer, and the community as a whole. These allusions need not necessarily be specific, precise or unambiguous. The designs seem to emphasise the qualities of complexity within uniformity: the massing and repetition of almost identical units generates a drama, grandeur and power that individual units lack; considerable diversity is possible within the overriding uniformity. Thus the designs may convey many of the essential qualities of trance dancing and trancing as perceived by the San themselves: individuality within community, the uniformity and unity of the participants, the sense of the strength of a community much greater than that of its individual members, simplicity, and the control of powerful forces. The designs may thus allude to the individual and the community, the trancer and his role within the community which supports him and which he serves and cures.

Interpretation of ovals in terms of a wide-ranging and allusive symbolism of many different aspects of potency within the community does not necessarily preclude the narrower and more literal view that the ovals illustrate bees' nests and honey combs. Honey may very well have been believed to be a source of potency and the ovals, in one of their aspects, may have been seen as symbols of this form of potency. The two interpretations are however operating in different dimensions of conceptualization. The literal interpretation limits, strains, distorts and diminishes the

richness and variety of the imagery of the oval and reduces it to a single illustrative element. It can account for only a fraction of the contexts, associations and variations of the designs. Imagery in this reduced form has none of the power, overtones, resonances and strength of the condensed symbol. Only those with the most superficial acquaintance with the design, ignorant of the extent of its ramifications in the art and wedded to realism as the basis of the art can adhere to such a limited approach. The important point in all this discussion is that the elements of the designs have been so transformed through their incorporation into the larger designs that the iconic element becomes minor, little more that an allusion and reference to their source. Illustration is once more, if in a different way, replaced by an abstraction of generalised qualities.[25]

From the study of the details, associations and transformations of the ovals, we can develop an interpretation that goes beyond the world of appearances. The great variations in design are persuasive that we are dealing with representations of a concept rather than realistic illustration of an object, an idea rather than something 'out there' in the physical world, a powerful image of some of the basic tenets of belief, a comprehensive symbolic conceptualization.

Dots

From their places in the oval designs, we have established something of the content of dots and flecks and located them within San concepts of potency. But dots and flecks are also found in wider contexts. Many paintings of people have lines of dots or, more simply and commonly, multiple parallel white lines, across various parts of their bodies. From their forms, colour and locations, these can be simply and directly interpreted as strings of beads. The families of dancers in **Fig.9.14 above** are not only adorned with strings of beads but are outlined and covered in white lines or dots, probably originally also arranged in lines. So is one of their hunting bags. The great trancer of **Pl.10.1 above** is covered in lines of dots identical to those that cover the oval that

is attached to him. Some of the dancers below him are covered in similar patterns of dots: **Pls.9.1 and 9.2 above**; in others only the penis is dotted. Many of these dancers' possessions - gourds, baskets and hides - have the same adornment.

A large, almost life-size snake, probably a python, in **Fig.15.17** and beside the dancers of **Fig.9.14 above**, is covered with lines of large white dots whose careful arrangement in lines is disordered only when the artist failed to manage the spacing of his lines as they turned the sharp curves of the reptile's body. **Fig.15.18** is a spiral which seems to be a non-figurative design rather than a coiled snake, for its coils are completely regular and there is no indication now visible of the shape of a head or tail. It was originally covered in white dots arranged in regular lines. Buffalo were one of the animals whose hunting and death were symbols of trance; in **Fig.15.19** a buffalo cow, painted with her calf, was once covered with similar lines of dots though now only vestiges remain on the paint that outlines her. In **Fig.15.20** two fish superimposed on an oval design have been given a particularly intricate cover of dots. Their bodies are outlined by white stripes; similar stripes run down their bodies, with lines of dark dots painted on the lines and white dots between them. Their faces are patterned with thinner lines and one at least has teeth filling its open mouth.[26] In **Fig.15.21** dark dots outline the remains of four stilted and static invented animals, two of which only have one fore and one hind leg.

Lines of dots - white in all but the last example - can thus appear on oval designs, people especially dancers, particular parts of people like the penis, their possessions, animals known to have strong connotations of potency, reptiles, fish, non-figurative designs and invented creatures. That they illustrate actual markings might hold good for the dancers, trancer or their belongings but cannot apply to the buffalo, snake or fish. They cannot be simply decorative patterns: a concept alien to the art. It is also unlikely, given the very strong similarities in the ways they

are applied and arranged, that they represent unrelated concepts. The ways that they appear on the oval designs established that there they referred to controlled potency immanent in people. This can therefore now be extended to all these other objects, to indicate that potency was a great deal more widespread and inhered in many different subjects and situations.

Flecks

Distinctions in form, colour and arrangement can be made between dots and dashes or flecks. Dots are generally white and flecks dark. Where dots are carefully painted and arranged, flecks are generally larger and more elongated and irregular in shape, more rapidly and carelessly painted with the brush dragged slightly across the rock surface, usually without any formal arrangement or pattern. Their shape induces a sense of movement, direction and dynamism that is inherently lacking in dots. One can follow the movements of the artist's hand across the rock and see the flows and lines of flecks that he created but these are for the most part the fortuitous result of technique and not intentional.

Variations on the oval designs have already provided us with an interpretation of flecks. In their simplest form, the ovals are omitted and only their enclosing circles remain; their interiors are filled with flecks and these stream out of opening in the circle and across the face of the cave (e.g. in **Pls.15.4 and 15.5 above**). We have already seen that they correspond to the dots that adorn oval designs. They are, both graphically and symbolically, a variation of these dots but they are now disordered, free, active, dynamic, moving out of the designs; if the dots represent latent potency, the flecks represent the same potency in an active form. As they stream across the rock face, they represent potency that has 'boiled over' and emerged from the potent object and is now active and less subject to its control, less ordered, more powerful and dangerous.[27]

There is a more elaborate variation of the fleck: a motif made up of three small converging lines that is

identical to our conventional sign for an arrowhead. We have seen how they can fill the spaces between and around ovals and stream in and out of openings in their enclosing circles, which suggests that they are an elaboration of flecks and connote the same concepts. They occur too seldom in the paintings for any more precise pattern to their contexts or range of associations to be determined. In **Fig.15.1** the outer strokes curve gently backwards like a swallow's wing. In **Fig.11.6 above** they, with trees, are superimposed on a distended figure; their association with the trees is much closer than with the figure. In **Fig.15.22** they fill the space between chest and jaw of the outline of a large and now unidentifiable animal, perhaps a rhinoceros, like the one on which they are superimposed.

Further possible variations of the flecks are the large dots probably applied with a fingertip and the rectangular shapes with a serrated end painted round the hunted zebra in **Fig.12.28 above.** The former are rare and the latter unique so far and thus impossible to analyse. Some distinction in content between them and flecks may have been intended but there is nothing in their contexts to suggest what this was or that they were conceived in any markedly different way from flecks. Lines of large dots underlie the transforming figures at the top of **Fig.13.24 above.**

Sources

Flecks often emerge from people and objects and have a strong directional flow: their sources can indicate their significance. Flecks flow down from one of the creatures with a serrated back, **Fig.15.13**, which we have established is a conflation of the elephant with the oval design. Lines of flecks emerge from the armpits of both the central male dancer in **Fig.15.17** (shown in detail in **Fig.9.14 above**) and the distended figure of **Fig.11.2 above.** In both cases, they obviously seem to represent sweat, which, the Kung believe, is, on a trancer, potency made visible and an effective agent in healing and in inducing trance, a vehicle for the transfer of potency.[28] Flecks also emerge directly from the swollen belly of the figure and it has already been established that

this is the very seat of potency and that it is swollen precisely because the potency is active and 'boiling'.

In many scenes of the hunting of large and dangerous beasts, flows of flecks emerge from their wounds, particularly from the trunks of wounded elephants and muzzles of dying zebra. In these cases they surely represent blood (e.g. **Figs.12.1-3 and 12.28 above**). Bleeding, like sweating, resulted from trance dancing and was another body fluid that was believed to be inherently replete with potency. More than this, we have already established that these hunting scenes symbolised the agony of the trancer and that the flows of flecks thus represented more than an animal's blood.

In **Fig.15.23** two long lines of flecks seem to come out of the muzzle of the large lion in the centre. Flecks and lion may not be contemporaneous and the different areas of flecks may have been painted in more than one stage. However this may be, the lion as an apparent source of flecks supports the interpretations we are pursuing for, more than any other creature, the lion was associated in San beliefs with highly active potency.[29]

Flecks were sometimes subject to human control. **Fig.15.24** is one of the few paintings where a specific activity seems to be illustrated. Several figures sit and stand around three tree-like forms which are surrounded by flecks. The figures seem strange, with their extremely elongated torsoes; thin, elongated and downturned muzzles; long thighs, short calves and penises reduced to the emblem of very long thin lines ending in a small tuft; however a great deal of this may be stylistic idiosyncracy rather than conveying that they belong to the supernatural world. Against this, one of the men, at the top left, has only one leg and, above the largest tree and next to the one-legged figure, there are two tiny spirit-figures with the characteristic fleshless, stick limbs arranged in very human positions and heads with pointed muzzles and very large ears. They are brought into close association with the human figures by sharing the same emblem in place of their penises. The central and largest figure holds out a long rectangular

object, perhaps a pipe like those examined in the discussion on dancing, though its relative thickness suggests some receptacle. He places one hand, very carefully drawn with the fingers detailed, over the top of it and apparently allows flecks generated in the object to escape from it and flow down and around the trees or collects in it flecks generated by the trees.[30]

Flecks can also fulfil the same role as the lines generated by distended figures and trancers. In the top left of **Fig.15.23**, some flecks are arranged between continuous lines and come to look like a ladder ; and small creatures clamber along it. These are the same as those that we have seen before attached to the lines that emerge from figures with distended abdomens (**Figs.11.3, 11.7 and 11.18 above**) and rise from a recumbent trancer (**Fig.10.4 above**). This small scene is further evidence that flecks have the same powers as the lines released by trancers and figures with distended abdomens. More than this, given the relative weight of the large field of dots to the almost insignificant and peripheral placement of the figures within it, one may be justified in concluding that the original audience would have been able to understand the significance of the flecks without having their effect on these semi-human figures emphasised.

Clusters and fields

Small clearly defined circular areas of flecks are set among the families encamped in **Fig.8.20 above**. In **Fig.8.22 above**, flecks swirl past an embracing couple and appear to link them with a tree. In **Fig.11.8 above**, flecks surround a small image of a figure with a distended body, though they do not appear to come out of her body. Small areas of flecks have been painted above the dying buffalo in the hunt shown in **Fig.12.10 above**: here they certainly not issuing from wounds and cannot represent blood. In **Fig.13.24 above**, flecks are painted round the small scene of two spirit-figures engaged in the stylised form of fighting with clubs that seems to have connoted the dangers of discord within a community. In **Fig.15.21** flecks cluster on the branches of a tree and are

painted beside it. In **Fig.15.25** a tree is surrounded by flecks; this simple little picture is a reiteration of much larger paintings on the rock face above it, where a great many trees are surrounded by large areas, swirls and lines of flecks. The most common and certain goals of flows of flecks are tree-like forms with roots, trunks and branches: **Figs.15.21 and 15.23-27** all show flecks around trees, forming their leaves and outlining their trunks. A great many more large painted panels and cave walls are covered with great expanses of dense flecks amidst trees. Flecks surround trees more frequently than they do for any other object.

Areas of flecks were a field for diverse images. In **Fig.15.26** a large field of flecks surrounds a tree with recognizable branches, trunk and roots; two seated women, one of whom holds her head; two small groups of hunters, a warthog and two tsessebe. Outside the field is the not unusual variety of images in relationships whose connotations can only be interpreted in the most general terms: many warthogs by different artists using different pigments, two of them upside down; two large hunters running fast; several fish; branches heavy with seed pods; a woman dancing, in the bottom left corner; a crude little sketch, lower centre, of a man holding up an arrow of potency with an inordinately large head; and sable and tsessebe antelope.

Fields of flecks are almost always amorphous and formless. The lines of flecks, especially those bordered by continuous lines and supporting crouched figures, in **Fig.15.23**, are exceptional. Only very seldom are flecks arranged to form recognizable objects. The clearest and most convincing example is **Fig.15.27,** where some of the flecks in a panel filled with flecks and trees cohere to form the shadowy but indubitable image of an oval: a further convincing demonstration that ovals and flecks are closely interrelated and that there is an essential identity between them.

Interpretation

The association of flecks with trees has encouraged most writers to follow Goodall and interpret them as "impressions

of landscapes" giving "a sense of wide open country" or, more specifically, as lakes, marshes, or "open bushveld": thus Lewis-Williams has described flecks in Zimbabwe as representing grass.[31] Interpreted in this sense, flecks have been used as the main evidence for what is believed to be one of the primary distinguishing features of the paintings of Zimbabwe: its illustration of landscape. We almost eliminated the possibility of any such interpretation being correct or even possible when we established that one of the basic conventions or principles of the art was that no image was ever placed in a natural setting, that all objects were viewed in isolation from their natural surroundings, that they were all extracted into a timeless conceptual realm.

Those who insist that interpretations must be based on realism or naturalism, now generally propose that flecks represent bees because they sometimes emerge from oval shapes which they believe illustrate bees' nests.[32] This interpretation is successfully challenged if the association of flecks with ovals does not comprehend all the usages of flecks.

It has also frequently been proposed that the arrowhead forms represent birds and this has led on to seeing the oval shapes from which they emerge as the boulders or banks in which large colonies of birds have built their nests. It has even been suggested that the arrowheads illustrate bee eaters or sand martins, which both nest in large colonies.[33] Such interpretations receive some support from the two definite birds painted in the same white pigment as the arrowheads on a perch immediately outside the exit of the ovals in **Fig.15.1.** It is more difficult to resist with **Fig.15.28,** where a flock of these shapes - in which the stroke of the body is thicker than the wings and makes them look even more bird-like - seem to fly away from a tree pursued by a much larger and predatory bird: a not uncommon scene in the skies round the paintings today.

If one is to seek the closest iconic correspondences to fields of flecks and due weight is given to the preponderance

of paintings of flecks amongst trees, such interpretations should recognize that the swirls and clusters of flecks illustrate the behaviour of swarms of locusts more closely than any birds, bees or any other creatures in their numbers, the ways they swarm, form patches and swirls of different densities, stream away from the main field and cluster densely all over the branches and trunks of trees and bushes and completely cover every part of them. Bees swarm in a smaller compact cloud which has a shape and form: only locusts can create an impression of such an infinity of bodies. The vast number of flecks that surround trees also militates against seeing them as birds. Other possible interpretations within this framework that spring to mind are wind-blown leaves, seeds, pollen or even sounds or scents of vegetation.

If interpretation is attempted in terms of San concepts, it is tempting to explain the arrowhead motifs as 'arrows of potency'. This can be discounted for while the motif may look like an arrowhead to us, we have already seen that paintings of arrowheads, and particularly those on what we have already shown are 'arrows of potency', look entirely different. Alternatively, they may be seen as thorns or stings and hence as representing the pricking, stinging, tingling sensations that trancers say they experience as they activate their potency. I prefer at present not to attempt any detailed explanation for the form or distinguish it from the almost ubiquitous flecks.

Dots, flecks and arrowheads are scarcely detailed or complex images. Therefore even more than so many other significant motifs in the art they cannot be reduced to illustration, set in a realistic model and discussed in the simple terms of "What do they illustrate?". Shapes of such simplicity lend themselves to a variety of usages but, in an art that is concerned above all with establishing a structure of signs that was widely, probably universally legible within the artists' communities, they were probably ascribed a limited set of connotations.

Something can be teased out of most of their very varied

contexts: some flecks are associated with people and situations that are already recognizable as sources of potency, like the distended figures and the dangerous hunt; others - like the symbolic fight - occur in situations fraught with tension or - like the copulating couple - emotions that are in themselves likely to implicate potency. Clusters of flecks, because of their connotations with potency and particularly the release of active, powerful and dangerous potency, were used to point to the heightened significance of some of the imagery, to the presence of potency, of supernatural power, inherent in a situation.

Throughout this chapter we have interpreted dots and flecks on at least two different 'levels'. In representational terms, we have shown how, according to their contexts, they may represent beads, blood, sweat, perhaps birds and, less probably, bees. We have already seen that all symbols in the paintings have references, often multiple, to the visible world of the artists and their audiences. But the underlying content of this variety is the same: potency. This is generated in the oval designs, in figures whose bellies are distended by active potency, by the great animals like the rhino and elephant and by creatures which conflate elements of the oval designs and elephants. It flows across large areas of paintings and thus integrates many diverse subjects. It can cluster, coalesce and congeal to form lines and grids that generate in their turn the malformed human creatures. It can become the 'bristles' and 'fur' of other forms of supernatural creatures and appear as the tiny multiple 'leaves' of tree- or plant-like forms. It has its origins in and links all the more important elements in the art. Its capacities are much greater and more varied than those of any single animal or insect, even one, like the bee, to which some San may have attributed potency and seen as a source of strong supernatural power.

The many paintings of large areas of flecks show how artists conceived of potency pervading their entire surroundings, a force hidden from the naked eye but present everywhere and made visible only through the paintings.

Particular forms of potency may have been given particular graphic forms to distinguish them. The association of flecks and trees is particularly strong, strong enough to suggest that flecks represent a particular form of potency that acts primarily on trees, not necessarily trees exclusively but more probably trees as the archetype or epitome of the plant world as opposed to that of man and animals. A parallel can be drawn with the Kung belief that a particular form of potency, now, influences the natural world and weather.[34] In this sense, flecks are indeed concerned especially with landscape, but not to represent it but to influence it. It is the failure to distinguish between these that has lead to the failure to realise the true significance of the motif. Flecks, far from being a rudimentary method of representing elements in nature and landscape, seem to be a means of delineating a force that permeates nature and landscape.[35]

NOTES

1. Parts of this chapter appeared in Garlake, 1990.

2. This is illustrated in Cooke, 1959: Pl.88. Inexplicably, he has transposed the positions of some of the cores and transposed the designs on some cores to others.

3. This painting was copied by Frobenius' team: Frobenius Archive Reg. No.711, Neg. No.F109.

4. These lines have been illustrated divorced from the elephant and described as "an abstract linear motif having certain rhythmic attraction" in Goodall, 1959: 109: a good example of what happens when images are considered apart from their contexts.

5. In the mountains of the south-west Cape paintings of elephants have been said to be second only to those of eland in their frequency and relatively at least twice as common as they are in Zimbabwe though there has been no suggestion of a similar range of sizes and forms. Images that have attracted particular interest show up to 14 elephant-like creatures, though usually only two or three, surrounded by zig-zag and "denticulate" lines - lines with tooth-shaped, spiky or semicircular humps incorporated in one of their sides, which form "boat-shaped" enclosures round the elephants. Sets of these lines are also found on their own, usually forming similar "boat-shapes"; some "boat-shapes" are solid forms with semicircular humps along their tops (Maggs and Sealy, 1983). Nothing quite like them has been

recognized in Zimbabwe but they are all sufficiently close to oval designs to suggest a similar formal basis, content and interpretation; their close association with elephants seems striking confirmation of the arguments proposed here, expressed in a closely related imagery from a distant region.

The Cape "boat-shapes" were taken as "conventionalised abstracts in the true sense of the word: non-figurative paintings which were meant to evoke a particular set of associations in the minds of the people who looked at them" and interpreted, before Lewis-Williams or Dowson had explored this aspect of the art, as visions experienced at an early stage of hallucination. The way that elements of them were combined with images of elephants was taken as typical imagery associated with deeper hallucination. Creatures with "human bodies but elephant-like heads and trunks", also found in the area, were taken as visions experienced at "peak hallucinatory periods". The authors concluded that, in the western Cape, the elephant was "a culturally controlled and highly emotive symbol of trance power", that these paintings "reflect a system of belief in which the elephant played an important symbolic role [which was] probably also reflected in dance and trance performance" (Maggs and Sealy, 1983: 48).

Woodhouse, 1985, in response claimed in his inimitable way to provide the "key to opening boxes containing elephants" by asserting that the zig-zag lines represented clouds, rain showers or lightning; the boat shapes rain clouds; the elephants rain animals and the white dots on some of them possibly snow or hail.

While I do not accept that the oval designs of Zimbabwe are either abstract designs or hallucinations, Maggs' and Sealy's conclusions are closely similar to my own, arrived at via a different route and through an analysis of very different sets of paintings.

6. Hall, 1914: Ch.3.

7. This image has been described as a "zebra-like animal" "trapped between rocks", "driven into the trap by a hunter behind it": Goodall, 1959: 14 and Pl.8. In an attempt to connect paintings in Zimbabwe, still seen in strictly representational terms, through San metaphors to San beliefs, it is described as a "conceptual animal 'caught' in a hive next to two trance figures...this painting most likely depicts medicine-men using the potency of bees to capture and kill ... a rain-animal": Huffman, 1963: 51.

8. Hall, 1914: 43.

9. Goodall, 1959: 62. Many of the details of an elaborate oval design in the Matopo Hills were interpreted by Cooke (1959: 46) as elements of a dwelling within a cave: the enclosing lines were the cave itself, the outer serrations "the outline of distant hills", the skyline of the Matopos, and the dark elements of the cores the skins hanging down in

front of the cave; though at the same time he confessed that the design could represent "almost anything".

10. Rudner and Rudner, 1970: 86, Pl.23. The same authors say of another oval design, 1970: 87, Pl.25: "It looks like a domestic scene with two naughty boys climbing around on grain bins."

11. Wilson, M. in Cooke, 1971a: 105. Cooke comments, ibid.: "This is certainly not as far-fetched as it appears at first glance. Many caves in the Matopo Hills would have afforded such a view. Land hacked out of the bush, cultivated with hoes and planted at intervals would certainly have shown a pattern which may have excited the interest of these early artists."

12. Smith, 1987.

13. Cooke, 1971: 105.

14. Pager, 1973: 345-52.

15. Crane, 1983: 23-4.

16. Guy, 1972.

17. Pager, 1973b: 6.

18. Huffman, 1959: 50-1. Having thus, to his satisfaction, established the significance of bees in the art, this has been extended and emblems attached to human heads are seen as graphic metaphors for wasp stings and arrow tips become metaphors for bees.

19. Katz, 1982: 45.

20. Katz, 1982: 46.

21. Katz, 1982: 214.

22. Katz, 1982: 41-2, 96, 297-8.

23. Katz, 1982: 297-8.

24. Katz, 1982: 52.

25. Woodhouse, 1990, responding to Garlake, 1990, insists that "at least 157" oval designs in Zimbabwe represent bees' nests. He gives no indication which these are or how they are to be distinguished from other oval designs. The figure, he says, is the number of paintings registered as "positively identified as bee-related" by M.R.Izzett of the Archaeological Survey of the National Museums of Zimbabwe. This is untrue. This list was compiled simply by going through the Survey records and listing all sites therein recording 'formlings' - as oval designs were once popularly

known. The Survey has never claimed completeness or accuracy and has relied on a wide range of informants; most of the paintings in it and in this list have never been seen by any competent observer, let alone "positively identified". Some on the list are discussed and illustrated in this chapter.

Woodhouse's other claim for the authority of his interpretation of ovals as bees' nests is that: "My paper [interpreting Zimbabwe oval designs as bees' nests] was originally delivered to the Diamond Jubilee Symposium of the South African Federation of Beekeeepers Association [sic]... supported by... 80 slides... seen by about 100 delegates. No-one contested my interpretation..." This is a classic example of the fallacies underlying so much of the traditional interpretation of rock paintings in South Africa. It assumes 1) that silence indicates agreement; 2) that audience numbers give authority; 3) that slides are a satisfactory basis for analysis; 4) that, once again, numbers lend authority and that the people with the most slides are somehow the most authoritative; and, most importantly, 5) that anyone is capable of identifying what is represented by any rock painting even if they have never even seen one, because they are all realistic representations of a reality which is shared across all cultural and temporal boundaries.

Apposite comment on some of these fallacies is supplied by remarks on a report of a spate of UFO sightings by nomads in Mongolia which I read at the same time as Woodhouse's piece: "The implication is that if a large number testify to the same sight, the sighting should be given more weight. But the reverse is true. What makes you think you can see a 10-foot-tall being is the fact that the person next to you says he can see one. When we lived in Jamaica, rumours once swept the island that giant Jim-Crows (buzzard-like birds) wearing top-hats were wheeling a coffin from Montego Bay to Kingston. Apparently the creatures spoke with posh English accents. Hundreds testified to it. Our maid, Cyrilena, went down to Kingston by bus to witness their arrival. She returned convinced that she too had seen them." (Parris, M. 1991. 'Diary', The Spectator, 267 (8511), 6).

I am not yet sufficiently confident in 100 beekeeepers looking at slides as authoritative interpreters of rock art to submit to their judgement or satisfied that they might not also suffer from the Cyrilena Syndrome that is the foundation of so much misguided assertion in South African rock art studies and which it must be the aim of all researchers to minimise in their own work and attempt to expose elsewhere.

26. Lewis-Williams and Dowson, 1989: 55-7, interpret fish as "signifying 'underwater'" and hence as a "metaphor for trance". Fish are illustrated here in **Fig.1.4 above**, with at least two different species illustrated, and in **Fig.9.11 above**, where two large examples are superimposed on the line that unites the dancers and three smaller and less certain examples among the dancers appear to be suspended from the line by their tails. I do not find sufficient evidence in

the contexts, associations or iconography of fish in the Zimbabwe paintings to demonstrate Lewis-Williams' and Dowson's interpretation applies in Zimbabwe. This is not to deny that it might be so, it is simply that I have been unable to find confirmation.

27. In interpreting South African paintings, but using a different approach, Lewis Williams and Dowson have reached similar conclusions: flecks "probably depict potency" because they were sometimes painted round groups of trancers and San trancers believed "the place where a trance dance is performed is redolent with potency" which trancers are able to see floating around them while they are in trance (Dowson, 1990: 91-2). In Zimbabwe flecks occur much more frequently and in a much wider range of contexts. Their associations must therefore be the subject of a different sort of analysis before we can be satisfied that we understand something of their connotations.

28. Katz, 1982: 106-7.

29. Lewis-Williams, 1985b.

30. Burkitt was with A.J.H. Goodwin when he discovered this painting in 1927. Burkitt interpreted it as a rainmaking scene: Burkitt, 1928: 119-20.

31. Goodall, 1959: 69; lakes: Goodall, 1959: Pl.37; open bushveld: Goodall, 1959: 62, Pls.33, 34. Presumably following Goodall, Lee and Woodhouse, 1970: 139, explain areas of flecks as a "marshy area" and a "Bushveld landscape". Lewis-Williams, 1983b: 31.

32. Guy, 1972; Pager, 1973b; Crane, 1983: 22-5.

33. Cooke, 1971a: 105; Petie, 1974: 3.

34. Marshall, 1957.

35. Lewis-Williams and Dowson, 1988, have sought to show that, given that all trancers hallucinate in trance and that hallucinations are a neuropsychological phenomenon, the result of direct stimulation of the brain and not a visual sensation, the images produced by hallucination stand outside culture and are universal. The interpretations put on hallucinatory images by those that experience them are, of course, cultural. Dots and flecks are a universal primary form of entoptics, or hallucinatory images, and trancers construe them as potency.

I shall not consider this proposition in detail for, though aware of it during examinations of paintings in Zimbabwe, I can see nothing in the forms, locations, contexts or associations of dots and flecks to support it as a basis for interpreting any paintings in Zimbabwe. It is also irrelevant to the arguments of this chapter: one can accept that dots or flecks may illustrate entoptics just as, on the

same superficial and illustrative level, they may illustrate birds, bees, blood, sweat or beads. However, on the level of significant content, they connote something else - potency - and here, despite our very different approaches to the problem, Lewis-Williams and Dowson and I are in agreement.

From the point of view of methods and approaches to interpretation and to the meaning of symbolism, it is however interesting to explore both arguments a little further. Entoptics, of their nature are seen as insubstantial, moving points of light or as aura surrounding or outlining more complex images: vague, impalpable and difficult to focus or grasp; "disengaged... free-floating... independent... incandescent, shimmering, moving, rotating... luminous... pulsating, flickering". Therefore, entoptics, of their nature, cannot have specific and limited points of origin. They cannot have either source or direction. They cannot include complex or conventionalised shapes. Their associations cannot be limited to a small range of specific objects within a scene. They cannot be carefully and precisely arranged or ordered. Yet these are all characteristic features of dots and flecks in Zimbabwe. Hence most if not all the dots in the Zimbabwe paintings do more than simply illustrate entoptic phenomena.

One can however still well argue, as Lewis-Williams and Dowson do, that the primary source of the imagery of dots and flecks was entoptic and that they were elaborated in the paintings to accord more closely with San beliefs. San, believing that potency became visible during trance, interpreted entoptics as visions of potency. Entoptics then became "swamped by iconic elaborations". Entoptic imagery was filtered, altered, elaborated and reduced to a particular range of motifs that accorded with beliefs about potency. It thus went far beyond the illustration of perceptions, whether visual or neuropsychological, and became a concretisation of thought and belief: an imagery of concepts not perceptions.

16. CONCLUSION

The age of the paintings in Zimbabwe must be estimated in millennia. The evidence for this remains circumstantial but is weighty and unequivocal. This sets them apart from those elsewhere in southern Africa or at least those in the Drakensberg on which most interpretative work has been done. It makes recourse to San ethnography for their interpretation problematic.[1] Lewis-Williams has insisted repeatedly that it is not possible to infer anything from paintings themselves.[2] I am more sanguine and believe detailed, systematic, comparative iconographic analyses can extend our understanding of the Zimbabwe imagery and enable us in part to escape 'the tyranny of the ethnographic record' which forces us to set the art always and inescapably in some artificially created yet eternal 'ethnographic present'.[3]

I believe that, at least in Zimbabwe with its own peculiar problems, as full an awareness as possible of the forms of the graphic imagery in all its ramifications is primary. This is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to achieve by statistical analyses of large numbers of images, certainly when categories are defined in gross and imposed terms as they have been in the past. It is equally impossible through manipulating such analyses using a system of linguistic analogies.[4] Pictorial and linguistic forms of 'communication' are fundamentally different.[5] If we are seeking significant patterns of pictorial relationships, contexts and associations within an art concerned with concepts and not mimetic, iconic, scenic, realistic or naturalistic illustration, those relationships have to form one of the basic units of any form of statistical analysis. They can be teased out of iconographic analyses, but I cannot see them emerge from statistical analyses as presently constituted or applied. However, statistical analyses of large samples of paintings may help to test some of the proposals developed here. This work can then be viewed as no more than the construction of hypotheses that still require much more rigorous testing. This I accept. But this will

not obviate the continuing necessity for iconographic analysis and the continuing development of hypotheses based on iconographic analyses as detailed and formal as those presented here. This is the only way that useful, relevant and revealing categories for counting can be constructed.

Comparative iconographic analyses of a range of paintings enable one to determine something of the nature of the imagery, the essential elements and permissible range of variations within particular types of image. I have then considered motifs and images and attempted to build up coherent and purposeful patterns of relationships. Only after such formal iconographic analysis has established the parameters of the particular imagery under consideration have I attempted to correlate the results with interpretations of paintings developed in South Africa or with what is known of San perceptions of their world. The two processes - iconographic analysis and ethnographic correlation - are separate: only once the formal foundations are firmly established, can the interaction between imagery and concepts become the creative on-going dialogue that Lewis-Williams has experienced.[6] What I have tried particularly to avoid is the approach adopted by 'prisoners of the ethnographic record' playing futile 'games of ethnographic snap', who borrow or develop interpretations of what they consider basic San concepts or beliefs and then apply them to an imagery which they appear to understand a great deal less well.[7] For my purposes and given the material with which I am working, I believe the pictorial image must come first, must be as fully understood as possible in the formal sense before exegesis from our distant, fragmented and uncertainly relevant knowledge of San culture can be applied to it.

Juxtapositions

In the previous chapters, we have analysed different sets of images in comparative isolation, taking account of juxtapositions or associations between images only to establish specific points. This is an analytical technique and explanatory device. I believe it is more rigorous than attempting ab initio to penetrate the intricate network of

relationships, allusions and resonances created and presented by whole panels of paintings. It carries correspondingly greater conviction. Though it may replicate something of the ways artists constructed their paintings, it does not reproduce the ways people saw them. A pervasive web of relationships was established by attaching the same motifs to many different images, establishing that they shared the same qualities. This can be demonstrated in some of the most striking and important images in the art. Let us therefore now briefly consider some of the panels whose elements have already been analysed in isolation and look at them as a whole. Though this reveals how much we do not understand, it also demonstrates how far we have advanced. I find it a reassuring process for it seems that many of the conclusions reached by analysis of isolated images are powerfully supported when panels in which they stand are considered in their entirety. Panels of paintings, aggregates of images, whole compositions, remind us how aspects of the imagery are reinforced and reiterated time and time again as one's eye works its way through dense conjunctions of diverse images. Sets of paintings may have no scenic, narrative or illustrative coherence but their conceptual coherence is much clearer. Each image and each set of purposefully juxtaposed images in a panel of paintings is unique. Each has something to reveal about content and only detailed iconographic consideration of every graphic element in a panel of paintings has any prospect of penetrating something of this. This implies that there can be no certainty until every set of paintings in Zimbabwe has been analysed iconographically. I accept the logic of this, but a start has to be made.

We analysed **Fig.8.5** in terms of its apparent depiction of the gathering of separate bands of hunters. As analysis proceeded however, it became increasingly clear that it was much more than this. The 'arrows of potency' carried by many of them, the whisks that some wave and the short sticks that others carry, the two long 'tails' hanging from many heads, the elaborate head adornments of others point towards a similarity with lines of other men with similar accessories

used in similar ways, as in **Fig.9.15**, who are much more obviously dancers or trance-dancers. A limp and upside down antelope and a small human figure apparently somersaulting, superimposed on and juxtaposed with the men in **Fig.8.5** may also carry allusions to trance and support the connotations of the main figures.

The same new significances can be discerned through close study of what initially appears to be a band of gatherers in **Fig.9.29**, but who have been shown to be not only dancers but to have bodies distended by and releasing potency.

Fig.12.8 probably illustrates the hunting of a large beast whose outline has now disappeared. Many of the hunters not only have the staffs and arrows of potency that are commonly associated with such hunts but crests on their heads, discs inserted in their arms and penises, leaves and more elaborate plumes on their shoulders, hoops on their necks and an incomplete figure amongst them.

Fig.8.7 is a panel on the same exposure of granite as **Fig.12.8** but on a separate face, round a corner and not visible from it. Here, one artist painted two women dressed and in the posture of dancers and with the discs inserted in their upper arms that we have seen in the painting of the nearby hunters and which suggest muscles bunched by the tensions of trance. Beside them, another artist painted four pipers; two of them have only one leg: a connection with transformation or the spirit world. Above them is a figure, **Fig.14.17**, that it has five heads and with so many successive additions to the penis that it is longer that the legs. Next to the pipers is a large scene of men with the sticks used to recover small animals from their burrows and one of them entering an antbear's burrow. Beside them another artist has painted four figures with unusually heavy manes divided into two and falling back from their heads; one is falling and the other three are recumbent though not in the most easily recognizable posture of trance; two have extremely thin limbs. Not far away on the same face is **Fig.15.28**, the group of 'arrowhead shapes' and tree that we have preferred to

interpret as potency inherent in the natural world rather than a flock of birds with their predator.

The cumulative effects of all these juxtapositions is considerable and all but the antbear hunt point clearly towards explorations of different aspects of potency. This makes one consider whether the antbear hunt may not be another way of representing an aspect of this. One is reminded that 'travelling underground' is taken to be a metaphor for trance by Lewis-Williams and Dowson.[8] I can only find support for this in one painting in Zimbabwe. In **Fig.1.2** an artist has painted four,and probably originally five, circles in a line, in and around which are large dots which have been established as representations of potency. An incomplete, armless human figure stoops to enter the first circle. These circles may well have been intended to represent an underground tunnel, something difficult to depict and solved in one way in **Fig.9.7**, where the antbear tunnel is shown in longitudinal section, and here in a series of cross-sections. This raises the possibility that all paintings of hunters in or near what seem to be the outlines of tunnels may have the same allusions.

Fig.8.17 has been used to illustrate women encamped with their possessions and a second group of women walking below them - or possibly another representation of the same group of women. There is however a recumbent male and probable trancer beside them, as well as a large bird with long legs, neck and beak, and on the left, an extremely attenuated hunter with an extremely elaborate curved and tasseled bar across the end of his penis. The women, in a dark pigment, have, uniquely as far as is presently known, dark and barely distinguishable stripes down their bodies and legs and across their arms, suggestive of a connection with dance.

In the panel illustrated in **Pls.9.1, 9.2 and 10.1** we have the dominant figure of a trancer, with a long and intricate tufted line from his penis, a mane and the curved lines of tusks, now transposed to the top of his head, an oval attached to his torso and his body adorned with the body paint of a dancer and covered in the same white dots as the

oval. The much smaller but clearly related dancers below him have the same body paint and some have similar white dots on them. Many have distended abdomens with lines emerging from them; others are attenuated. A jackal-like creature in their midst has an enormous mane and equally large tusks of transformation rising from its mouth.

In **Fig.10.3** the recumbent trancer is not only identifiable with the oval, he is also surrounded by the heads of small male and female antelope. Beside him is a long legged and necked bird, a trunked creature with only one fore and one hind leg, with another below it and two other creatures with similar legs above him: one a small antelope and the other horned with a carnivore's long tail. There are also two trees, one at least with flecks round its trunk. The three hunters and three gatherers not only have unusual proportions, which may be no more than artistic idiosyncrasy, but the gaping mouths which elsewhere invariably hold tusks. The central hunter holds a small two-legged creature and he and at least one other have tufted lines coming from their armpits, while the central gatherer has a small animal protruding from her bag and the woman in front of her has a line coming from hers. Here then is another complex conjunction of motifs of whose significance we are a little more certain through studying them in isolation.

In the panel illustrated in **Figs.11.4, 11.5 and 12.15**, we have considered the large distended figure with its partner, the man lying pierced with arrows beside it (**Fig.12.15**), the smaller distended figure at the top of the panel under three hunters with arrows of potency (**Fig.11.5**), the bleeding men with an unusual range of emblems on their heads at the top of the main set of paintings and the six one-legged figures, all shown singly and scattered across the panel by different artists, crouching and recumbent, two bleeding from their faces and one with the butt of an arrow of potency piercing his body. One can also notice, at the bottom right, a markedly elongated and contorted hunter with his chest left unpainted and a smaller crouched figure with the same unpainted chest on the left of him. Superimposed on

the very carefully painted pair of meandering double lines emitted by the large distended figure are several women. In the top curve of one meander, a woman sits with gourds, bags and a hide behind her and a compact group of radiating lines in front of her - plants she is preparing, one of which she lifts to her mouth, or her fire. Below her are striding figures whose sex is not explicit: two have gatherer's sticks and two have aprons but the bags hanging from the shoulders of the two aproned figures and that hanging from a third are more like a hunter's than a gatherer's. Below them are five women facing left, three of them aproned and all bending forward and swinging their arms as if dancing. A spray of disc-shaped plants is set amidst them. A smaller and more naively painted solitary aproned woman at the bottom left seems to confront a feline painted with equal lack of expertise. This panel brings together social archetypes with a range of figures with many of the attributes, emblems, distortions and symbols of different aspects of potency.

In **Fig.12.13**, the bleeding healer and his similarly bleeding patient are surrounded by three separate scenes of hunters with arrows and spears of potency killing strange beasts, and above them hovers a figure whose arms have been transformed into wings. The fallen figure pierced with a multiplicity of arrows in **Fig.12.14** has a tufted line coming from his penis; he and his companion are in positions like that of a trancer and are juxtaposed with an oval design nesting within an enclosing line with a tufted end.

In **Fig.12.23**, we have concentrated on the large superimposed elephant and buffalo and the processes of transformation that are taking place to the figures along their backs. On the elephant's forelegs is a crouched incomplete figure and on its hindlegs, two attenuated figures, one prone and holding the tufted line coming from navel or abdomen that seems associated with transformation. The elephant's legs have been deliberately stretched and extended to cover as far as possible the paintings at the bottom of the panel. Here many artists with different proficiencies have painted hunters and at least one gatherer,

using different techniques, to different scales, and with different degrees of detail, none forming coherent compositions or scenes. Four tsessebe cows and two calves are superimposed on the buffalo; two large kudu cows dominate the lower section of the panel. Above the latter is a kudu bull and a long-necked bird with only one long leg. The kudu cows have elongated bodies and exaggeratedly thickened necks and hairy dewlaps; the bull is distorted in the opposite way with an over-long neck.

In **Fig.12.24** our focus has been on the elephant superimposed on a very large and complex oval design and on the bichrome figures undergoing transformation along its back, whose fleshless, elongated limbs end in talons and whose postures are as extraordinary as their bodies. One of them has only one leg and amongst them is a creature with extended wings and a bird with long legs neck and beak. They are superimposed on lines of very carefully painted large dots. Other examples of these fleshless, semi-human figures have already been pointed out elsewhere in the panel. An artist working in a very different style added a piper (**Fig.9.25**) and a figure lying on his back towards the bottom of the panel. There is a figure very possibly by the same artist, walking towards them and just to the left of them, swinging a small pouch, but with the tufted line emerging from his navel that, in other paintings, can be associated with transformation. Another figure, under the elephant's neck, has the same emblem and bleeds from its face. All seem intended to carry references to and amplify the allusions and significance of the other attenuated, transforming figures. In contrast, the groups of figures on the far left, some archetypal hunters in their postures and weapons and others less well-defined, seem to have none of the distortions of body or posture or the emblems, and hence none of the metaphysical content, of those described. We can only say the same of the several tsessebe cows and one kudu cow painted on the right.

In **Fig.12.25**, we have noticed the several swaying, falling and fully recumbent men and hunters, the

fleshlessness of the smallest one's arms, the way he clutches his swollen little abdomen, a figure with even longer and more grotesque limbs and two long talons to each hand, an incomplete torso, an outline figure with a single leg, and a creature with a head at each end of its body. Juxtaposed to these is a seemingly entirely ordinary family group, a line of four hunters, two with leaves on their shoulders and one of these holding a disc and, in front of them, two gatherers by a different artist using very different proportions. Uniting the composition is the large outline of a rhinoceros and, at the bottom left corner is a single large oval shape.

In the panel shown in **Fig.12.26**, a considerable variety of animals, geometric shapes, plant forms, emblems and human figures appear to have been brought together to develop a single theme, to reiterate, comment on and expand its messages through allusion and symbol. In this case the theme seems to concern the maternal, and the small, young and defenceless: a subject that has little or no place in the human imagery. On the right of the panel, the first painting was of a young elephant, still unsteady on its feet: it is in fact a composite creature for its fore legs are hooved. The largest painting here is a kudu cow, whose heavy rounded body may indicate pregnancy. Over and around these two images, different artists have painted at least 24 small antelope of different species; some have the short upright horns of a duiker, a particularly unusual subject. Their theme of smallness is repeated with two lop-eared tsessebe calves; with two baby antelope curled in their nests; and with a variety of other small animals - bush pigs, ant bears, wild dogs, hares and spring hares - most of which are also young or have their young with them. The only human representatives are two women with bags slung and raising their digging sticks; by alluding indirectly to maternity they may continue the same basic theme. A tree or branch with round fruit at the end of each limb seems to extend the theme of reproduction or fruitfulness into plants.

The centre of the panel is dominated by the outline of a large female rhinoceros, an overall unifying agent for the

whole set of paintings. It is followed by its calf. Attached to and extending it, almost growing along and out of its tail, is the now fragmentary outline of a series of ovals, drawn in part as dashes or bristles, and with the emblems of the whisk and disc repeatedly attached to its outline. Under the rhino calf, the theme is taken up by group of baboons in which a male accosts a receptive female with a baby: they are surrounded by the last of the small antelope and hares.

The left of the panel 'changes the key' and shows a line of kneeling dancers, which has been progressively extended by different artists. All kneel and hold their abdomens from which lines emerge in some: all probably had whisks attached to both shoulders: the emblem of the oval design. Below them is a solitary dancer holding combs in each hand, with a disc suspended from each elbow and a whisk on each shoulder. Around him are a group of sable, including a calf right beside him. To the right of the dancers are several figures, mainly women, though two of them who kneel, have hunting bags, bows and arrows beside them. All their arms come to a sharp point: a deliberate distortion which makes them look like 'flippers' and which may allude to some form of transformation, perhaps to birds: two large birds were painted beside them and there are more birds painted with unusual realism to the left (not visible in this reproduction). The remaining images include a feline under the rhinoceros' belly and, below it at the bottom of the panel, a pair of adult tsessebe, an immature tsessebe and a zebra. One of the tsessebe stands on the flat topped outline of an oval.

This panel is an example of the way that a connecting theme can run through the imagery and bring together the most diverse subjects so that the same theme permeates and unites people, animals, plants and the supernatural. It is rarely that this can be discerned with such clarity and is only apparent here because most of the animal subjects chosen are so unusual in the paintings. Different artists have taken up the theme and expressed it through different subjects and

images, through a range of animals all of which share the same essential qualities of smallness and immaturity, weakness and the need for protection. It suggests that animals were selected and painted to represent particular qualities. In a similar way, we have already seen how the disc emblem appears to be a theme running through the paintings of **Figs.14.6, 14.7 and 14.8.**

From **Fig.15.16**, we have analysed the hunters and dancers at the bottom left and the large snake on the right: all covered in dots of potency. They are juxtaposed with a file of diminutive hunters with extraordinarily large bows enclosed within the double lines of a circle. Above them is a group of what seem to be roots, tubers, seed pods or fruit, whose shape is reminiscent of the disc emblem, also enclosed in a circle. A single figure in the same pigment stands with raised arms beside them. Above them is a group of very different plants.

In **Fig.15.21** we have seen how dots outline four strange creatures, only partially preserved and standing rigidly, and how flecks outline and surround a branched form. At the top is a line of four small figures: one holds a disc, another waves whisks and another's thickened arms come to a point as 'flippers' or embryonic, featherless wings. On the right is a larger figure with his body lengthened and bending impossibly far backwards. Below him is the small, probably unfinished, outline of a small elephant; another figure holding a disc up; and a woman with two large aprons, waving what seem like whisks. On an adjoining face to these figures is the isolated painting of a hunter with a complex range ot attributes, **Fig.13.4.** Towards the centre of the main panel is a fine kudu bull, with long hair on his dewlap, and a zebra. Below them are four men, to our eyes too inadequately delineated to add to the concepts explored in this panel, though one has forked arrows of potency in his shoulder bag.

Finally, we can return with new insight to the three panels which were the starting point of these investigations. In **Fig.1.1** we now recognise the references in the two large beasts - an elephant and a heavy but unidentifiable bovid-

like creature - that dominate the panel, the many oval designs - many of them reduced to a simple monochrome core, the pair of little figures with distended bodies at the bottom right, the incomplete figure beside them and similar figures left deliberately incomplete elsewhere in the panel, the carefully painted triple lines that emerge from a solid circle and zig-zag across much of the face and the small trunked creature with only two legs. We notice again tsessebe cows, at least eleven of them, all with sets of parallel white lines across their necks and legs.

But it is the human imagery that is predominant in this panel: the file of gatherers - bottom centre, the one or two hunters, the nursing mother, but above all, the families of parents with children- at least six such groups, by different artists and in different pigments. Here we see how the human image was reduced to essentials, stripped of all that is transient, divorced from the particularities of complex actions, without scenic or narrative coherence, in this case even without all clothes or equipment, and recreated as an archetype.

In the panel illustrated in **Fig.1.2**, the animals - lion, zebra, large and small antelope - continue to largely elude interpretation, though a tsessebe lies limp under the lion's jaw while a small antelope is simply reversed. At the bottom, the nursing mother has the father's equipment beside her: and can now be seen as an abbreviated but succinct visual establishment of an archetypal family. **Fig.1.2** is notable for the detail of the elephant hunt and we now know how symbolically important such images were. The lines of figures can now be identified as dancers. There are the three men with raised arms on the left, tailed, tasselled and perhaps aproned and caped, with perhaps five more simpler figures added on both sides of them, the one furthest right kneeling with an elaborate tufted bar to his large penis. Next to them in the centre of the illustration is the armless figure crouching to enter the tunnel represented by the line of circles. Below, at least ten men dance, two raising short dance sticks and several apparently also caped. Below this

is a line of seven men, leaning forward and seemingly swaying and weightless. The now fragmentary line of kneeling women at the top, the only traces of some of whom are the white lines of their body decoration, look very like a dance chorus. The cluster of different species of carnivores by different artists on their left suggest other allusions to trance or transformations of trance. The panel is completed by a very large oval design - **Fig.1.3.**

In **Fig.1.4** we can now attach new significance to the oval design at the top right, to the several rhinoceroses, one of them pierced by arrows, to the incomplete figure and to the zebra with lowered head and apparently bleeding from its muzzle. We can do the same for the elaborate heads of the arrows of the pair of hunters at the bottom of the panel; we can transmute the significance of the dense group of men at the top from hunters to dancers through the addition of two figures with what we can now recognize as dance rattles strapped to their arms. We can also now recognize several of the lines and shapes at the bottom of the panel as fragments of further oval designs.

Archetypes

Beside the many popular writers on the paintings, some serious and systematic researchers still insist that the predominant references in all paintings are to everyday reality: the "art mostly shows people carrying out activities of their daily life. This large share of unspecialized activities makes it seem as though the painters wanted to place emphasis on 'normality'... Answers have to be found for the question, as to why the overwhelming mass of depictions does not, even superficially, give the impression of dealing with something other than sheer ordinariness."[9] Pager was among the first to recognize that this was not so: "Narration is hardly the purpose of the art and a record of daily life not at all... Naturalistic appearance was almost invariably sacrificed in favour of the depictions of basic concepts and essentials."[10] He went no further and generally failed to apply these insights to his interpretations. Vinnicombe agreed that the paintings "are not a realistic reflection of

the daily pursuits or environment of the Bushman... Subjects that were commonplace but essential components of the lives of the Bushmen are excluded... The artists were not imitating nature, but were selecting patterns or basic formulae from nature which they repeated time after time... The Bushmen did not paint simply what they saw but selected what was symbolically important to them."[11] Some interpreters are convinced of the "normality" and "ordinariness" of the imagery and others hold as strongly that "naturalistic appearance", an "imitation of nature", "the commonplace" and "daily pursuits" are excluded from the paintings.

I approach the problems that these very different views raise by attempting to determine iconographically the nature of the imagery and how it was constructed, visually, technically and conceptually. I have shown that the human figure, as depicted in the paintings, seems ageless and to stand outside time in the sense that images of people are not concerned with particularities, specifics or the accidents of time or place. The paintings are not concerned with individuals, with personality or idiosyncracy. There is almost no exploration of the human form as individual, personal, beautiful, emotional, sexual or erotic. There is almost no attempt at portraiture. All adults are shown in what seems like the prime of life and children are generally shown as miniature adults. There are no paintings of wounds, deformities, weakness, sickness or the ravages of age. All Zimbabwe paintings appear to show this sense of distance and detachment, the lack of personal engagement by the artist and to be based on a process of abstraction of essentials, constructing generalized images lacking all particularity. They are less mimetic, figurative or naturalistic records of things seen than intellectual constructs.[12] I have termed images of this sort 'archetypes'.[13] Only in a very subsidiary way were these archetypes defined by activities: illustrations of hunting, gathering, procreating, child rearing, dancing, trancing or healing exist and can be identified but they constitute an extraordinarily small proportion of the art.[14]

If this is accepted, the primary thrust of the art seems to have been on defining archetypes in the simplest, most legible and least ambiguous ways, generally by using what might be termed attributes or motifs. Hunters were defined by bows and arrows, shoulder bags containing arrows and a whisk. Gatherers were defined by their large two-handled bags and long sticks. A complete inventory of possessions and equipment was frequently carefully laid out and catalogued beside its owners and confirmed and reiterated the designations established by the primary motifs. Possessions in themselves could define archetypes, even though no figures are shown.

Postures and gestures appear to define dancers, and probably different sorts of dances.[15] So do dance accessories like lines of dots denoting strings of beads, body paint, dance sticks, and, among men, tails worn hanging over the buttocks. Gesture and accessory could be combined to define dance, as with men waving whisks, in contrast to hunters who always keep their whisks in their bags. Some dance attributes can be matched with current Kung practice. Others have no apparent ethnographic parallels, like the 'tails' or 'flails' carried by groups of men, the long straight rigid 'pipes' held in front of the face, crescent shapes held up in one hand, 'disc', 'leaf' or 'comb' shapes held in the hand or tied to the shoulders.[16]

Archetypal trancers have no characteristic accessories; identification rests primarily on a distinctive posture, with one leg bent so that the foot rests on the other knee and one or both hands holding the head. Lines from the face and lines or flows of dots from the armpits denote nasal bleeding and profuse sweating. Blood and sweat are both considered by many San groups to be particularly potent fluids and released during trance-dancing. Hence they were also defining attributes of trance.

One panel of paintings, **Pl.16.1**, provides a particularly clear illustration of the ways that archetypes were used to build up this idealised, ideologically based generalization of a concept of society. One of the largest painted caves

has, high above the main concentration of paintings, a set of paintings of human figures that dominate the rest of the paintings and has always attracted a great deal of attention for, as a result of their position, they are unusually large, dark, clear and simply and broadly painted and not confused by superpositions. They have been the subject of much speculation.[17] The largest are probably all by a single artist or group of artists working together, with smaller figures interspersed with them added later and copying them. The whole panel has sufficient visual coherence for it to be interpreted scenically as illustrating the activities of a camp but it can be seen equally as an aggregate of individual images covering a range of basic concepts.

On both flanks are upright striding figures of hunters with their weapons. Along the bottom is a man bending over his hunting bag, his weapons supported beside him. Next to him, a seated man holds an arrow and has sets of arrows laid out in front of and behind him. Above them, down the centre of the panel, are three separate scenes of women sitting within sets of semicircular lines representing their shelters, with gourds and the large bags used by gatherers beside them; two of them are bending over querns and grinding. Small figures of children are with them and their fathers sit immediately outside the shelters. In the line of images along the top a seated figure holds a hand to his face, another holds her head with both hands, another has lines coming from its abdomen, and another lies on his back with one foot on the other knee, probably also holding his head; a small seated figure at his feet, again hand to head, attends him. Immediately beneath these top figures are three variants of oval designs: two clearly defined circular areas of dots and a similar circle formed of concentric lines. Immediately right of this line of figures, a woman bends over a seated and bowed figure and extends both her hands to its back, apparently massaging it. All these top figures have attributes established in other paintings as indicators of trance: the posture of the recumbent figure, the hands holding head and face, massage and the areas of dots.

Thus men are depicted in the lower register as archetypal hunters, women in the central register as archetypal wives, mothers and gatherers. At the top there is a range of figures trancers and healers: another archetype. Trance takes its place with other characteristic and defining activities but it is difficult to consider that it is a component of each scene. It is even more difficult to see this panel as a representation of the spirit world, unless one assumes that the artists were trying to establish that world as essentially identical to this one, in which case any analytic distinction between the two is meaningless and interpretations of the paintings as representations of the spirit world rendered entirely impossible to substantiate.

Emblems

Archetypes were qualified by attaching a range of attributes to them. Some are so simple, specific and precise that they can be considered 'emblems'. We are far from understanding what these signify with any precision; the vocabulary is large and their contexts various but at least some patterns of associations are becoming discernible. A tight knit and pervasive web of relationships was established by attaching the same emblems to many different images, suggesting that they shared the same qualities. Elements of complex images were reduced to motifs and transferred and applied to other images.

The widespread use of emblems and the connotations with potency that have been adduced for them suggest that there were at least two and probably more 'dimensions', 'planes' or 'levels' present in the imagery. One was primarily concerned with representing, exploring, confirming and celebrating perceptions of the basic roles of all people within their community and the community itself. The other was primarily concerned with the metaphysical content implicit in the first. It was concerned with the spiritual energy, the potency, inherent in the individual, the community and the whole world of the artists.[18] The two may be separated for purposes of analysis; they are not divisible in any other sense; they were not perceived or conceived as distinct by

any San groups as far as we know nor are they in the imagery. To this extent one must agree with Lewis-Williams and Dowson that the art was "primarily", "overwhelmingly" or even "exclusively" concerned with the representation of different aspects of "shamanism" through different visual and conceptual means. But this, it should now be clear, is too narrow a focus for a full understanding of the art of Zimbabwe. It takes no account of the large body of paintings there where metaphysical allusions appear minor or non-existent and where the whole thrust of the imagery is concerned with delineating people as hunters, gatherers and parents, doing such ordinary things as picking fruit, preparing food, conversing or making love: the great body of material that some describe as illustrating the "normality" and "ordinariness" of life and others have described as "illustrating basic concepts and essentials".

In another sense also, the art can be said to represent the metaphysical ideas on several different visual levels. In what would seem a very crude analysis to prehistoric San artists, we can categorise these paintings as firstly, direct illustrations; secondly, as illustrations of ideas; and thirdly, as symbolic. The paintings reiterate the same concepts in three different visual planes: human, animal and non-figurative. Aspects of the powers of trance are depicted on the human plane through illustrations of men in trance or suffering symptoms of trance and through figures with swollen abdomens and emissions from them. On the animal plane, the same powers are represented through hunted, wounded, bleeding and dying animals of particular species. On the non-figurative plane, they are represented through a range of oval shapes. In the rock paintings of Zimbabwe, the elephant, alone among all the animals, seems to conflate the three dimensions.

<u>The nature of the art</u>

Graphic archetypes almost by definition confirm social, sexual and ideological stereotypes. Such art is an intellectual construct which filters and alters perceptions to conform with an ideal. Through manipulation of a limited

but nevertheless comprehensive range of archetypes, the paintings' references comprehended the whole of society and its values. The human archetypes embodied the essence of the human condition, the purposes of men and women, their responsibilities, their potential and power as perceived by the artists' society. The images were graphic celebrations of the nature of society, the roles of men and women in it, fulfilling their established roles in production and reproduction, as providers, hunters and gatherers, as parents and members of a family, a group and a society, as healers and trancers, as repositories and agents of a multiplicity of different forms of potency. Through archetypal images of the human figure, the art presented a social and moral order. The paintings were embodiments of ideology, of ideological perceptions of society, direct visualizations of human significance as the artists understood it.[19]

The concept of an art of archetypes goes some way towards explaining the nature of the art. Pager (in his theory but not his practice), Vinnicombe, Lewis-Williams and Dowson have all insisted that the art was not concerned with narrative but have not fully explored why this should be so. They also claim for it stronger or lesser degrees of symbolism but do not fully explore how these might operate. If the art was concerned primarily with the construction and formulation of archetypes, this necessarily implies that it was almost entirely symbolic and the elements in its construction, the attributes or emblems, had an equally symbolic content.[20] By definition, an art devoted to presenting or embodying archetypes has a very diminished illustrative component. Archetypes eliminate ephemera, therefore narrative painting - i.e. frozen moments in a changing sequence of events - by its nature was precluded from the art.[21] If the Zimbabwe paintings do not illustrate narratives, do not tell stories and very seldom seem to have temporal dimensions or sequences, they can have no direct connection with myth or folklore.[22] This is part of the evidence that San pictorial and oral arts operated in very different ways.

The emphasis that has been given to emblems and the ways that they seem to have had precise and specific associations, references and connotations, and were used to qualify and define elements of the images on which they are placed, should not obscure the richness of allusion of much of the imagery. The human archetypes are in themselves conceptual and graphic constructs rich in resonance and allusion that refer to the whole of the human condition.

It can be claimed that establishing notions of archetypes and attributes is simply a step on the road towards 'meaning', a somewhat boring technical means towards a much more interesting end. Many other investigators have set as their aim, the determination of the 'meaning' of the paintings.[23] I prefer to avoid the term; its ambiguities make it a concept almost impossible to handle.[24] The symbolic content of the imagery is simply too rich to be reduced to a term more applicable to non-humanist or exact sciences. The construction of the symbolic archetype was, in some sense and in our necessarily limited perception of the art, as far as we can follow the artists.

NOTES

1. Lewis-Williams, 1987, offers some consolation: he has claimed to demonstrate that basic Xam and Kung concepts, perceptions, beliefs and practices were universal among southern African hunter-gatherers and that they are represented in the paintings. He has accounted for this by claiming that the content of the paintings was determined by ideology which in turn was determined by social relations which in turn were determined by an economic and technological hunter-gatherer base common throughout southern and eastern Africa. He has demonstrated further that neither great ecological differences nor prolonged and intimate contacts with other very different social formations affected ideology. Wilmsen, 1986: 358, concludes, from Kung interpretations of paintings that one of them did as an experiment for him, that these recent Kung "paintings seen in the context of others that are centuries old attest that the [Kung] cosmological structure... has a very long history that extends into the archaeological past."

2. "It is now impossible to suppose that we can confidently infer much from the art that we do not already know from the ethnography." (1984c: 246). "Without a verbal commentary of some sort it is impossible to know the meaning intended by a painter... some explanatory accompaniment is essential for

unambiguous interpretation... Expectations of learning about San material culture and beliefs from the art alone are too sanguine... It is clearly wrong to suppose that the art speaks directly to Western viewers... No art communicates as directly as this... Where there is no ethnographic evidence for an artefact or practice, let alone a belief, over and above apparent depiction in the art, the hallucinatory and symbolic nature of many paintings precludes inference..." (1986a: 171, 177, 171, 177). "Rock paintings, like any other pictures, remain unintelligible without some verbal commentary, for, unaided visual images lack the power to communicate unambiguously." (1987b: 232).

3. See Note 38 of Chapter 9 for quotes of another view. It is, however, clear that throughout this work I have used analogies with some of the more widespread and fundamental San practices to establish the content of much of the imagery.

4. Lenssen-Erz, 1989.

5. Wollheim, 1987: 44 and passim.

6. Lewis-Williams, 1981: 34. Iconographic analysis has, of course, been used successfully by Lewis-Williams and Dowson but with a different thrust: they are primarily concerned to use it to demonstrate correlations between elements in selected images and aspects of San belief. Given my material, my approach is necessarily different.

7. E.g Huffman, 1983; Smith, 1987; or Solomon, 1991.

8. Lewis-Williams and Dowson, 1990: 9-12.

9. Lenssen-Erz, 1989: 349, 369.

10. Pager, 1971: 32-3 and 1973a: 323.

11. Vinnicombe, 1976: 347, 349, 350.

12. Solomon, 1991, writes "Though interpretation by reference to trance has been extremely productive in studies of San rock art, many paintings make no obvious reference to trance and features of the art which have been interpreted primarily in terms of trance may also be interpreted in relation to gender ideology. It may be suggested that neither is primary and that both are relevant relations of meaning; no doubt other relations of meaning await identification and will contribute to studies of polysemy of the art. To decentre trance is not to deny its importance, but to permit exploration of other avenues of meaning." If her arguments were widened and pursued, it seems she would also arrive at something close to an understanding of the art in terms of archetypes.

13. This term is not intended in a Jungian sense of the archetype as shared and common "archaic remnants... of a biological, prehistoric, inherited unconscious" (Jung, 1964: 47, 67-9). Other terms that convey something of what I intend by archetypes are stereotypes, paradigms, generalised images or collective representations, but I find none of these
as satisfactory.

14. Thus, from the nature of the artistic system, from what its aims were and the ways it achieved these, there can be no correlation between the numbers of participants in a painted scene and the actual compositions of human groups. It is part of the old representational fallacy to suppose that some useful purpose can be achieved by counting images in a scene and interpreting these in terms of social organisation, as in Maggs, 1967 or 1971, or Manhire et al., 1983.

15. Lewis-Williams, 1981, Ch.7, identifies attributes indicating dance and trance in the paintings of the Drakensberg and these are returned to many times in many of his subsequent works. Lewis-Williams and Dowson, 1989, is almost entirely devoted to the same subject though couched in different terms. Many of the attributes identified by them serve the same purpose in Zimbabwe but there are many not found in Zimbabwe and others in Zimbabwe that have not been identified or, at least, not discussed in South Africa.

16. Garlake, 1990b.

17. Cooke, 1959: 148, uses these paintings as a main support of one of his fundamental theses, that paintings in Zimbabwe record 'Bantu migrations'. "The painting appears to depict activities which might belong to the Bantu... this cave which is hidden far up a very steep hill... an ideal observation post from which to watch the activities of wandering bands of unfamiliar people." Holm, 1987: 36-40, attempts through these paintings an "analysis of a complete panel", "one comprehensive panel". He takes these paintings to depict a "theme of drought and thirst" with "disabled people", "crying children standing all around", "distress", a "meatless meal" and a "tired woman having her back rubbed" and makes this the basis for supposing that the cave was a "sanctuary for the 'ritualistic gatherings' of a 'rain conjuror'". This analysis is one of the most salutary examples of interpretation based on an indiscriminate mix of description with subjective responses to the paintings, in which a range of emotions is attributed to the subjects which it is quite impossible to derive or sustain from the imagery itself.

18. Katz, 1982: 197-201.

19. Here I realise I approach what Geertz has called "the so-called functionalist view... that is, that works of art are elaborate mechanisms for defining social relationships, sustaining social rules, and strengthening social values"

(Geertz, 1983: 99).

20. Vinnicombe (1976: 347, 352) glimpsed something of this when she claimed Drakensberg paintings show bows and arrows "more frequently as a technological adjunct rather than a weapon of the chase", "visually associating hunting weapons with male sexuality" and "digging sticks ... are represented more as an abstract symbol than as a practical instrument for digging".

21. In the same way it is highly improbable that any Zimbabwe painting could depict an historical event: the basis of a great deal of Cooke's interpretations.

22. Despite many efforts, attempts to show that paintings illustrate San myths have proved implausible (e.g. Woodhouse, 1984). Throughout southern Africa, the animals which feature in San folklore are very different from the animals of the paintings. In folktales, predators are the commonest actors, followed by birds and small animals. Few involve the large game animals (Hewitt, 1986). In all paintings throughout southern Africa, antelope are the commonest animal subject and carnivores, birds and small animals appear much less frequently. There is thus a very strong negative correlation between the subjects of paintings and stories. This is yet further confirmation that the paintings are not only not illustrations of stories but served a different purpose or fulfilled the same purpose in a completely different way. Myth and painting may both be vehicles which share, express and communicate the same basic concerns of San society but they do this in quite different ways and through different structures and are entirely distinct and autonomous.

23. Lewis-Williams has given his aims as the recovery of the "significance" and "meaning" of the art (1981: 3). The latter I do not emulate. But he has also given them as the construction of a "model of the way in which the paintings communicated... ideas and values central to San thought" (1981: 3) and "to uncover the principles informing the art... the very nature of the articulation between the art and San thought" (1987b: 253). These aims we share.

24. See Sperber, 1975.

APPENDIX

Selection of sites

I selected sites to visit which promised to have significant numbers of paintings. Much of this was sheer guesswork, though one probably develops some intuitions about the reliability of information and informants. My main source of information was the 'record cards' of some 4000 sites in the Archaeological Survey of Zimbabwe, housed in the Queen Victoria Memorial Museum in Harare. They are extremely variable in quality. Many are derived from replies to questionnaires sent to farmers and administrators by the Historical Monuments Commission (now incorporated in the National Musums) in 1938 and 1967 and have never been checked on by experienced observers. Most are almost entirely uninformative: no more than "Rock paintings on Farm X; location unknown; not visited; unconfirmed". A small minority give usable map references and detail of the order of "Elephant; many kudu; strange animal in tree; c.20 human figures" and an informant's name: usually the most useful item from which to assess the record. With one exception, other enthusiasts have generously shared their information with me. I have also consulted all publications that deal with Zimbabwean paintings. Several commercial farmers have also been contacted, or have contacted me, and taken me to paintings on their farms and farms nearby.

Numbers of sites

The Archaeological Survey lists only a tiny fraction of the total number of sites in Zimbabwe. Even the most casual search will reveal many sites unrecorded in the Survey. 360 painted sites were recorded in the 2000 sq km of the Matopo Hills when Walker conducted his survey of this area (Walker, 1980: 22) and many more have been recorded subsequently. In the Darwendale/ Trelawney area not far west of Harare, in open savanna where granite hills are not a dominant part of the landscape and surfaces suitable for painting are limited, 79 sites were located in an area of 400 sq km, and the area was not thoroughly searched (Tucker and Baird, 1983). Of these only 18% were previously listed in the Archaeological

Survey although it is a well developed part of the country long settled by white commercial farmers, the principal sources of information on paintings. If these densities are extended over just the 60 000 sq km of granite exposures considered suitable for painting (Cooke, 1969: map on p.28), there must be well over 12 000 sites in the country, possibly twice that figure.

Types of site

Painted sites can be divided into MAJOR, IMPORTANT and MINOR sites by the type of site and the number of individual paintings it contains. Site types are:

1: single boulder offering little or no shelter
2: small shelter
3: large overhanging rock face providing some shelter for at least 10 people
4: deep cleft, but with uneven rocky floor unsuitable for habitation
5: large cave with level occupation floor capable of providing shelter for at least 30 people.

Numbers of paintings at each site can be arbitrarily divided into five groups:

1: up to 30 paintings
2: 30-100 paintings
3: 100-200 paintings
4: 200-500 paintings
5: more than 500 paintings.

MAJOR SITES are those in the 4.4, 4.5, 5.4 and 5.5 categories; 27 have been examined out of a probable total of 30-50. IMPORTANT SITES are those rated 3.3, 3.4, 3.5 or 4.3: 12 have been examined out of a probable total of about 100-200. MINOR SITES, those rated 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 3.2, 4.1, 4.2, 5.1 or 5.2, and probably total over 99.9% of the sites in the country: 183 have been examined.

Sites visited

222 painted sites have been examined, photographed and catalogued. Most of the paintings examined and all those traced lie in Harare District and the ten districts that surround it on the west through north to the south east, extending up to 100 miles from Harare. The table enumerates by districts major, important and minor sites seen, sites traced extensively and sites traced.

Harare	0	1	41	9	4
Makonde	0	0	26	6	4
Mazowe	1	2	13	5	2
Bindura	7	1	1	7	0
Goromonzi	2	2	9	5	3
Murehwa	3	0	6	5	3
Mutoko	4	1	3	4	4
Marondera	0	0	19	6	6
Wedza	1	0	33	4	1
Makoni	1	1	4	2	0
Guruve	1	1	7	2	3
TOTALS	20	9	162	55	30

Sites have been visited, photographed and catalogued in another seven districts, concentrating on major and important sites. These include all the MAJOR sites (as defined above) in the Matopo Hills, Matobo District, probably the richest concentration of paintings in the country.

Mutare	0	0	4	0	0
Nyanga	1	0	0	0	0
Masvingo	0	1	1	0	0
Ndanga	1	0	0	0	0
Chibi	0	0	2	0	0
Umzingwane	1	0	0	0	0
Matobo	4	2	14	0	0
TOTALS	7	3	21	0	0

Recording methods

My records of each site consist of a written descriptive

catalogue and complete photographic coverage in colour. These were taken with a hand-held Asahi Pentax MG 35mm SLR camera with lenses from 28mm to 150mm in focal length and Agfa or Kodak colour slide and colour reversal film: in all more than 3000 slides and prints.

Tracings of most or all the paintings were made at 55 sites and selected tracings taken at 30 other sites. Over 350 tracings, from single images to large panels, were made with fine felt-tipped marker pens intended for use with overhead projectors - green and blue are colours that contrast best to the reds and browns of the paintings - on A1 sheets of 125 micron clear acetate, temporarily held against the rock surface with adhesive masking tape and overlapping as necessary. These were then all retraced onto 90gm Gateway Natural Tracing Paper using black Indian ink by me. Prints can be made directly from these or they can be photographed. The acetate sheets can be cleaned and reused repeatedly. A light four-step aluminium ladder proved useful at many sites. Longer ladders were also used at some sites. Every item used had to be imported by me into Zimbabwe: not one was or is available locally. Zimbabwe Government Foreign Exchange and Import Controls ruled out any attempt to adopt the possibly more refined and very much more expensive tracing methods used by the University of the Witwatersrand or Harald Pager in the Brandberg, for example, where a transparent plastic foil with a surface that will take pencil lines was used and all foils kept permanently.

I was helped in tracing the paintings by up to four assistants at any one time: the maximum number whose work I found I could supervise sufficiently closely. Tracing requires no great training, skill or ability but it does require visual acuity, some familiarity with drawing techniques and, above all, intense and sustained concentration and sufficient experience of looking at a wide range of paintings with the care needed to recognise details. Tracing paintings is a time-consuming, arduous, uncomfortable and exhausting process. Most people also find it tedious and pointless and they - and a surprising number of others - are

not able to concentrate on the work with the necessary intensity. I have sought for complete accuracy and precision in the tracings but recognise this is not achievable. Tracings are diagrams. It is no more possible to capture the full character of a rock painting by tracing it than it is to reproduce any other work of art by tracing it.

I am aware that tracing rock paintings is coming under increasing criticism world-wide for the damage it may cause them,[1] and that new recording methods are being developed elsewhere. My excuse for relying on tracing is that it will be decades before such techniques are available in Zimbabwe - their introduction depends on an official commitment to research into and preservation of rock paintings that is at present entirely absent; that the damage caused by responsible tracing is infinitesimal if it occurs at all; that meanwhile many other agents - environmental, animal and human and, particularly, deliberate vandalism - are, throughout Zimbabwe, destroying unrecorded paintings at an infinitely greater rate than responsible tracing; and that tracing is almost infinitely less damaging to prehistoric material than another perfectly accepted method of archaeological investigation: excavation.

NOTE

1. Bednarik, 1990a, 1990b; Genge, 1990. I have little respect for either of these authorities, who both appear to me to be busily grinding various axes that they seek to use for purposes that have very little to do with conservation. Their criticisms must be read in the context of the vituperative debate on the interpretation of rock paintings which continues in South Africa. A response to their criticisms and a defence of tracing as a recording technique is Loubser and den Hoed, 1991.

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ROCK ~~PAINTINGS~~ ART IN ZIMBABWE

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Thesis submitted for the Degree of Ph. D.
at the School of Oriental and African Studies,
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1992

VOLUME 2
(ILLUSTRATIONS)

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14.5 Figures with pairs of leaf shapes on body.

14.6 Figures with discs.

14.7 Four hunters with discs.

14.8 Clapping figures.

14.9 Kneeling figures with whisks: detail from Fig.12.26.

14.10 Tusked figures.

14.11 Tusked creatures.

14.12 Kudu cow. Mucheka, Mangwende CL, Murewa

14.13 Snake and three felines.

14.14 Antelope with protrusions on heads.

14.15 Antelope with protrusions on neck.

14.16 Composite panel.

14.17 Five-headed figure.

15.1 Horizontal oval design. [redacted]

15.2 Vertical oval design. [redacted]

15.3 Vertical oval design. [redacted]

15.4 Four sets of ovals. Gwangwadza, Mangwende CL, Murewa

15.5 Chequered oval design. Gwangwadza, Mangwende CL, Murewa

15.6 Dots within lines. Gwangwadza, Mangwende CL, Murewa

15.7 Curved ovals. Gwangwadza, Mangwende CL, Murewa

15.8 Oval design. [redacted]

15.9 Designs of curved lines. Mucheka, Mangwende CL, Murewa

15.10 Recumbent hunter. Gwangwadza, Mangwende CL, Murewa

15.11 Male figure. Lake Chivero D, Harare

15.12 Ovals and recumbent figures. Mucheka, Mangwende CL, Murewa

15.13 Trunked creature with serrated back. Gwangwadza, Mangwende CL, Murewa

15.14 Trunked creature with serrated back. Murewa Cave, Mangwende CL, Murewa

15.15 Trunked creature with serrated back. Murewa Cave, Mangwende CL, Murewa

15.16 Trunked creature with serrated back. Markwe, Wedza

15.17 Snake embellished with dots. [redacted] White lines and dots are shown black in this reproduction.

15.18 Spiral with dots. Mucheka, Mangwende CL, Murewa

15.19 Buffalo with dots. [redacted]

15.20 Fish striped and dotted. [redacted] White is shown in solid colour in this reproduction and dark colours are shown outlined.

15.21 Composite panel. [redacted]

15.22 Arrow-shapes. [redacted]

15.23 Area of flecks. [redacted]

15.24 Panel with flecks round branched shapes. Domboshawa, Chinamora CL, Goromonzi

15.25 Tree and flecks. [redacted]

15.26 Area of flecks. Gwangwadza, Mangwende CL, Murewa

15.27 Flecks forming oval shape.
15.28 Arrow shapes.

SITES ILLUSTRATED

GURUVE

7.14, 7.26, 8.3, 8.34, 8.35, 9.11, 9.18, 9.19, 9.31, 9.32, 12.18

11.10

Zombepata (1630D4 TS675371) **Pls.15.1 - 15.5**

15.1, 15.2, 15.20

15.3

MAKONDE

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13.13

7.21, 8.4, 12.7, 13.6, 14.15

7.27

15.23

9.17, 12.26, 14.9

9.8, 9.9, 9.10

9.12

9.26

13.4, 15.21

MAZOWE

9.20, 12.27

7.8

13.14

7.16, 8.7, 9.23, 12.8, 12.9, 13.5, 15.28

1.2, 1.3, 7.5, 7.6, 8.10, 9.27, 12.5

[redacted] 12.1, 14.10

[redacted] 7.2, 9.28, 13.22, 14.16

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Chikupu South (1731A4 UR185707) 9.29, 11.15, 11.17, 13.23

Chikupu West (1731A4 UR183707) 8.26, 9.15

[redacted] 6.4, 15.22, 14.13

[redacted] 7.1, 7.15, 8.31

[redacted] 6.5, 9.22, 12.28, 13.16

Lion's Head (1731D1 UR413643) 1.4, 7.23, 8.28, 9.13, 9.16

GOROMONZI

Domboshawa (1731C1 UR063524) 12.3, 15.24

Lower Makumbe (1731C1 UR117021) 7.17, 7.20, 14.1

[redacted] 8.32

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[redacted] 8.25

[redacted] 8.15, 9.21

[redacted] 10.3

[redacted] 10.5

[redacted] 7.3, 11.12, 11.13

[redacted] 8.36

Glen Norah (1730D4 TR851189) 13.11, 13.12, 13.18

[redacted] 12.21

Somerby Cave (1730D4 TR684271) **Pl.7.1**

[redacted] 8.1

Lake Chivero B (1730D4 TR851189) 7.11, **Pls.15.13, 15.14**

Lake Chivero D 15.11

MUREWA

[redacted] 14.6, 14.7, 14.8

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Gwangwadza Cave (1731D1 UR551384) 7.12, 7.19, 7.22, 8.30, 9.1, 12.2, 12.20, 15.4, 15.5, 15.6, 15.7, 15.10, 15.13, 15.26

Gwangwadza Rock 13.2, 13.3

Mucheka (1731D1 UR556574) 7.7, 8.16, 8.29, 9.2, 9.6, 9.30, 9.34, 13.1, 13.19, 13.20, 14.12, 15.9, 15.12, 15.18

Murewa Cave (1731D2 UR692512) 8.13, 8.23, 11.8, 13.21, 15.14, 15.15

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Charewa (1732A1 VS127057) 8.8, 9.3, 9.7, 12.6, 12.29

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[redacted] 10.8, 11.3, 11.4, 11.5, 12.15

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[redacted] 9.4, 13.17, 14.4

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[redacted] 7.24, 13.7

[redacted] 7.10

[redacted] 10.2

[redacted] 7.4, 15.19

[redacted] 7.13, 12.31

[redacted] 8.19, 12.12

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[redacted] 12.11, 15.27

[redacted] 8.17, 15.25

[redacted] 10.4

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[redacted] 15.8

WEDZA

[redacted] 9.25, 13.8, 12.24

Markwe Cave (1831B3 UQ462590) 1.1, 7.9, 7.25, 8.14, 10.1, 15.16

[redacted] 12.32, 14.11

[redacted]) 8.32, 14.14

[redacted] 11.7

MAKONI

[redacted] **Pl.15.9**

[redacted] 12.4

Diana's Vow (1832A4 VW259703) **Pls.9.1, 9.2, 10.1**

[redacted]) 8.5

[redacted] **Pl.15.10**

NDANGA

Dengeni (2031A4 UN238601) **Pls.6.1, 15.11**

MATOBO

Nswatugi (2028C2 PH535296) **Pls.7.2, 7.3, 7.4**

Bambata (2028C2 PH468324) **Pl.15.8**

Silozwane (2028D1 PH640183) **Pl.16.1**

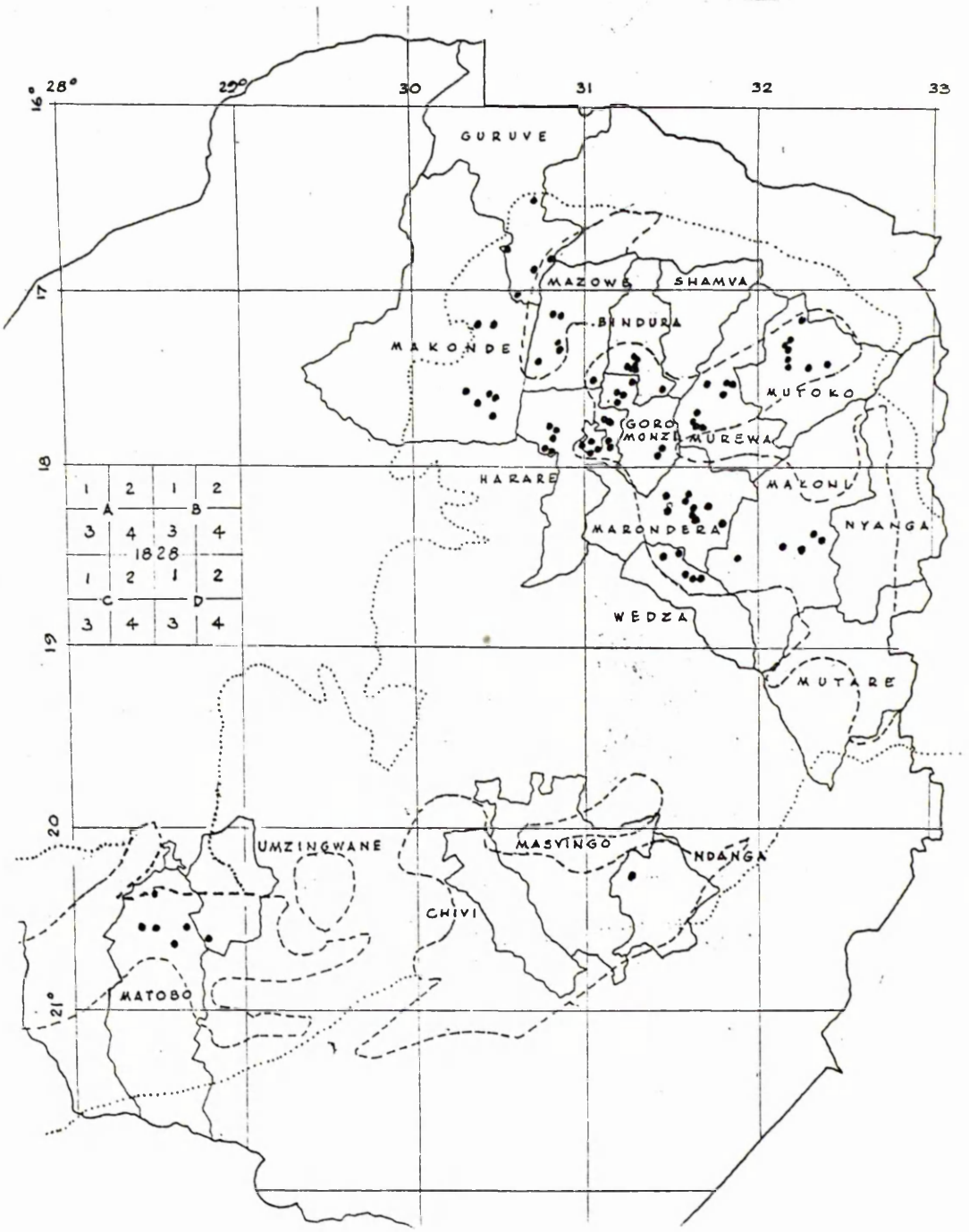
Inanke (2028D1 PH696184) **Pl.15.6, 15.7**

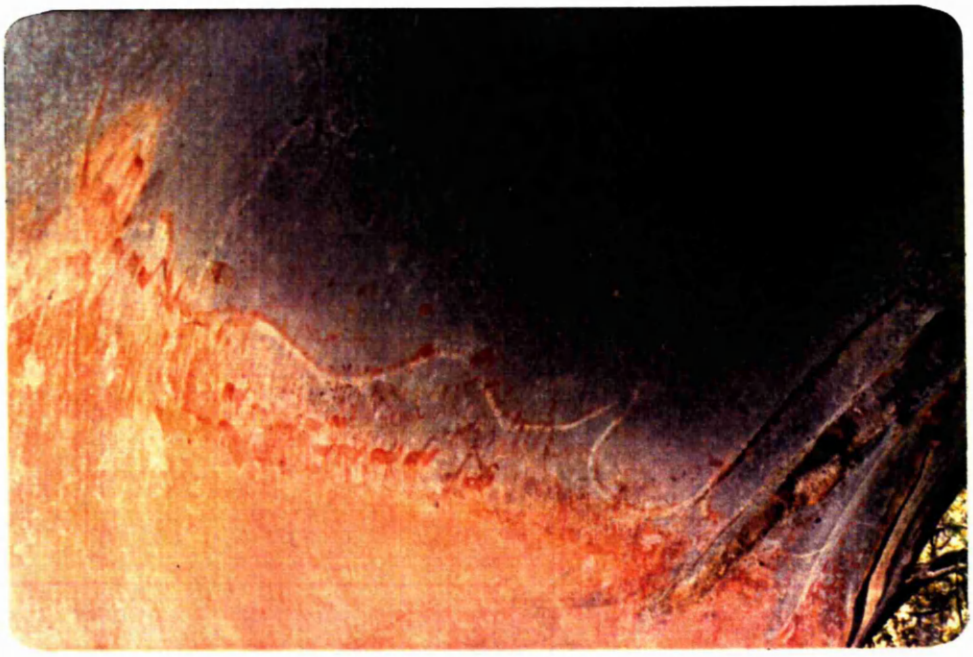
[redacted] **Pl.8.1**

UMZINGWANE

Gulubahwe (2028D2 PH865221) **Pl.15.12**

Map showing the sites illustrated and the Districts in which they occur. The dotted lines enclose the limits of granite exposures. The broken lines enclose granite exposures most suitable for painting.





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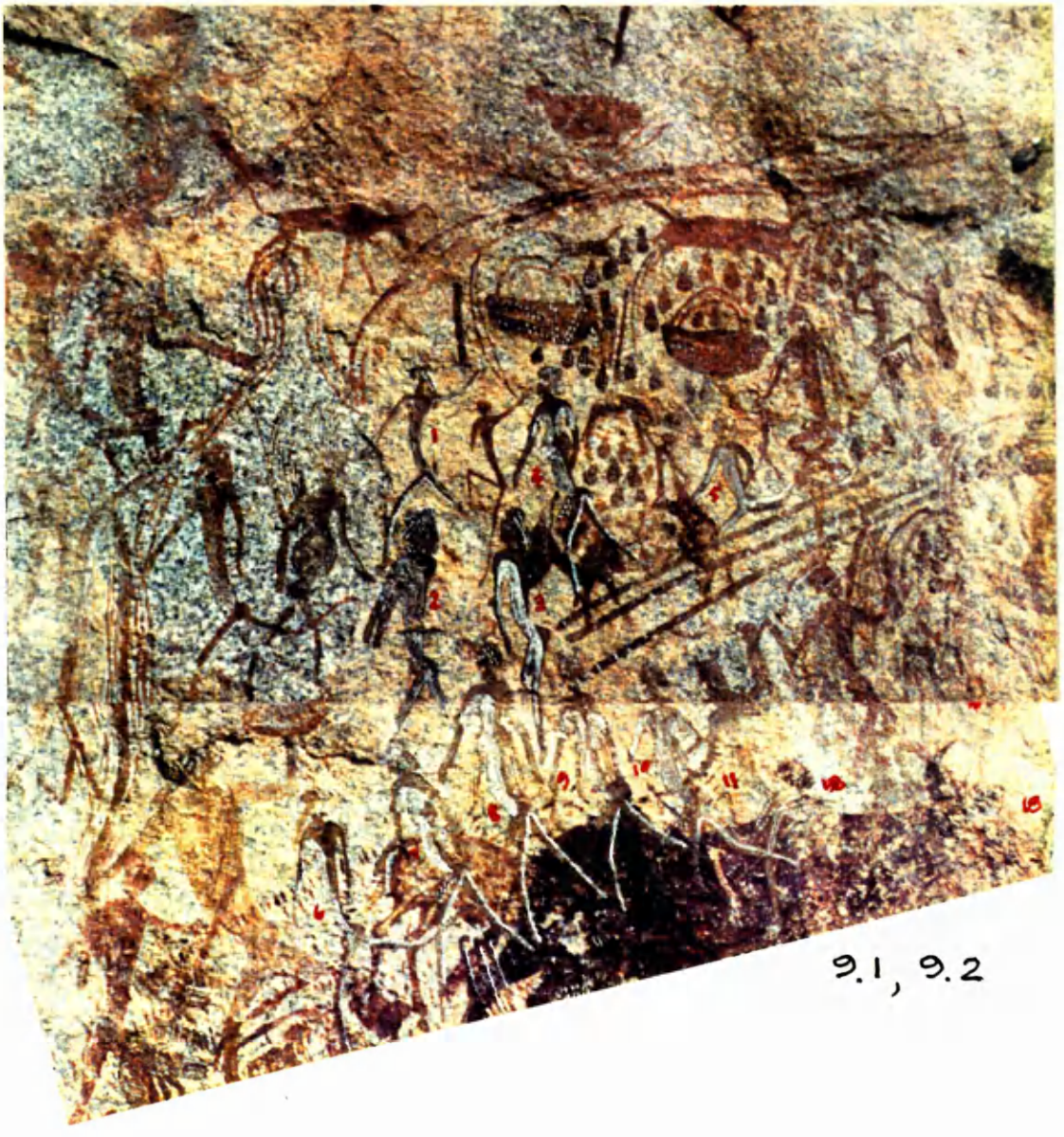

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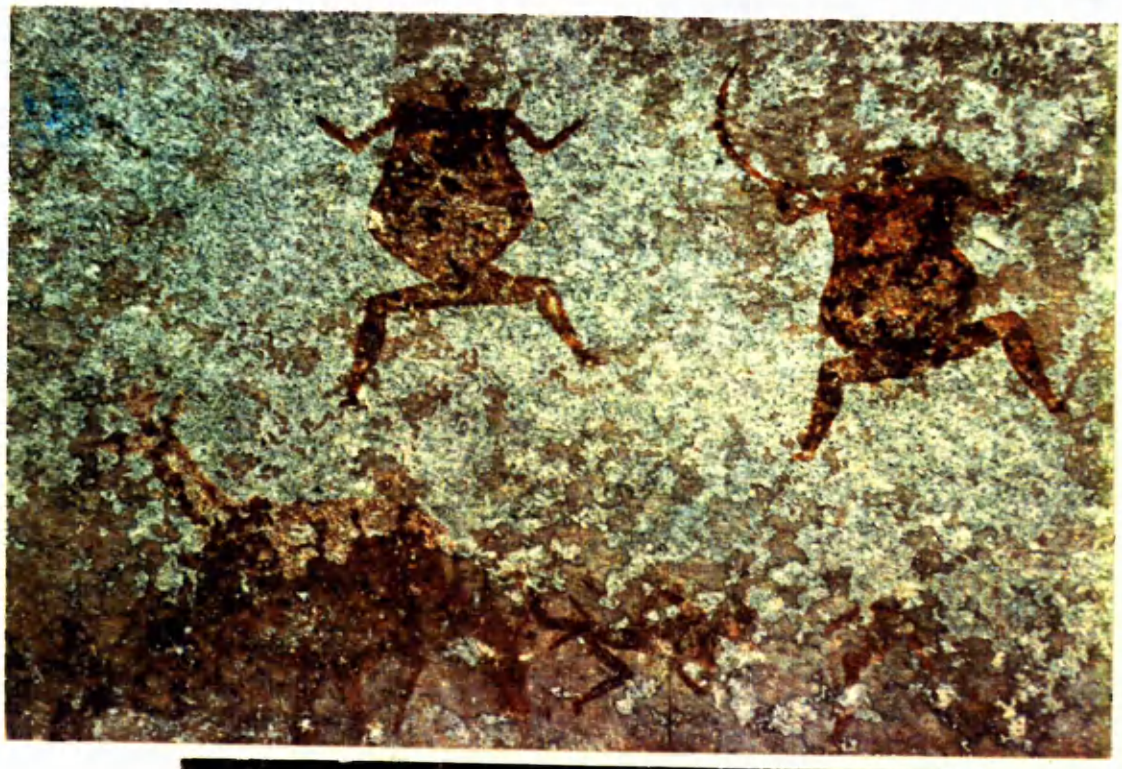

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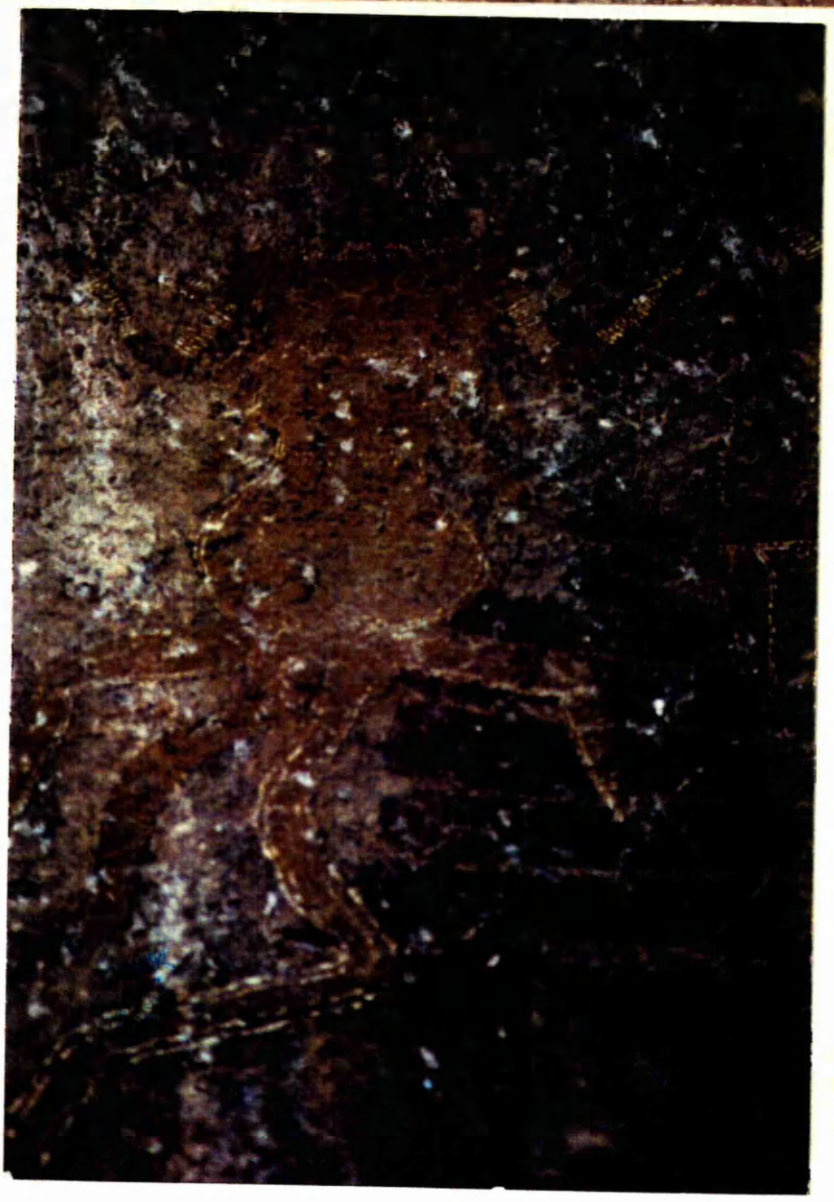

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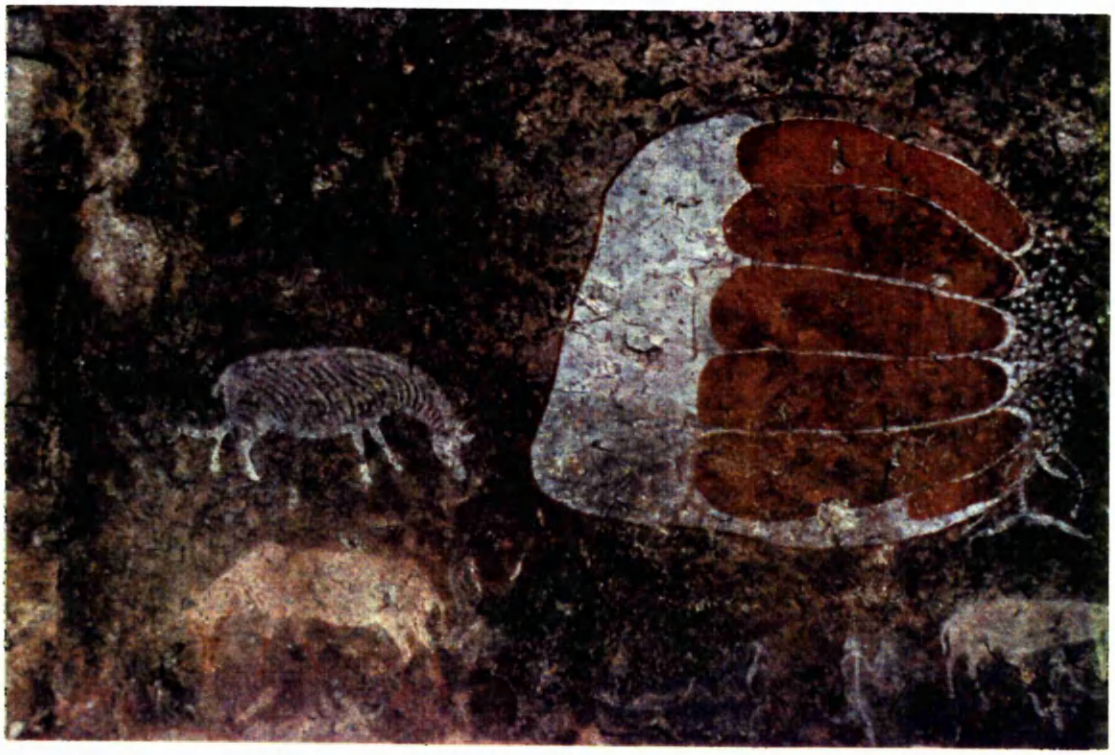

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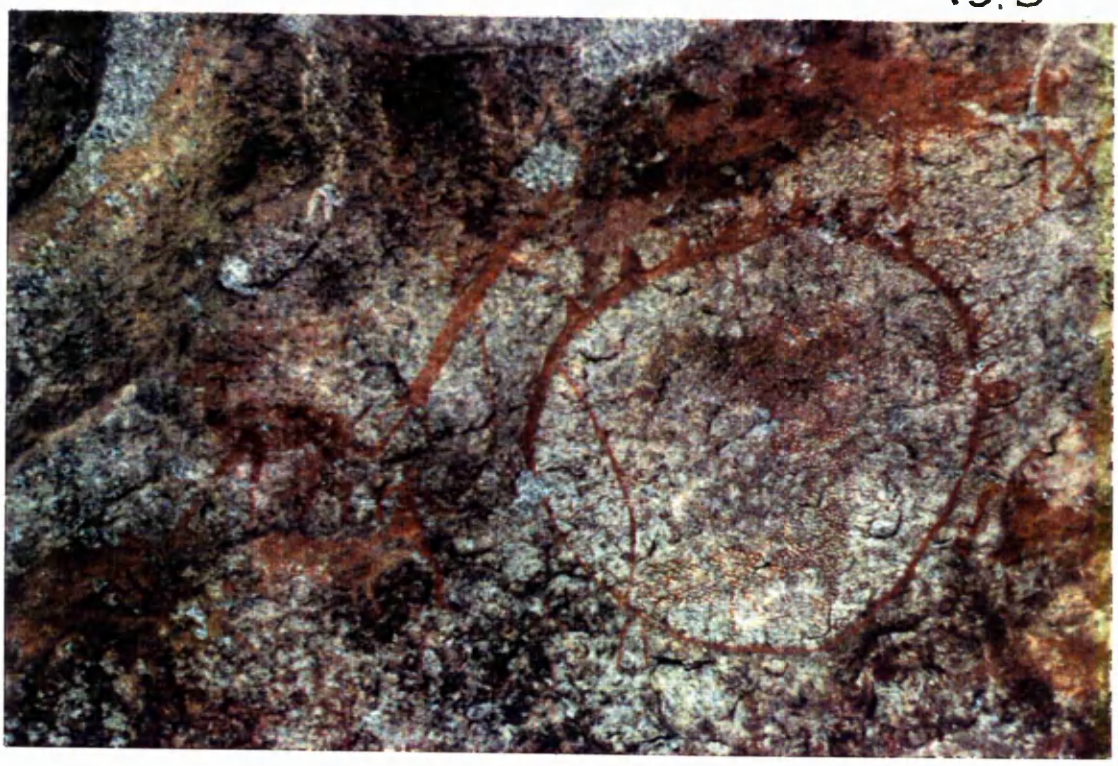

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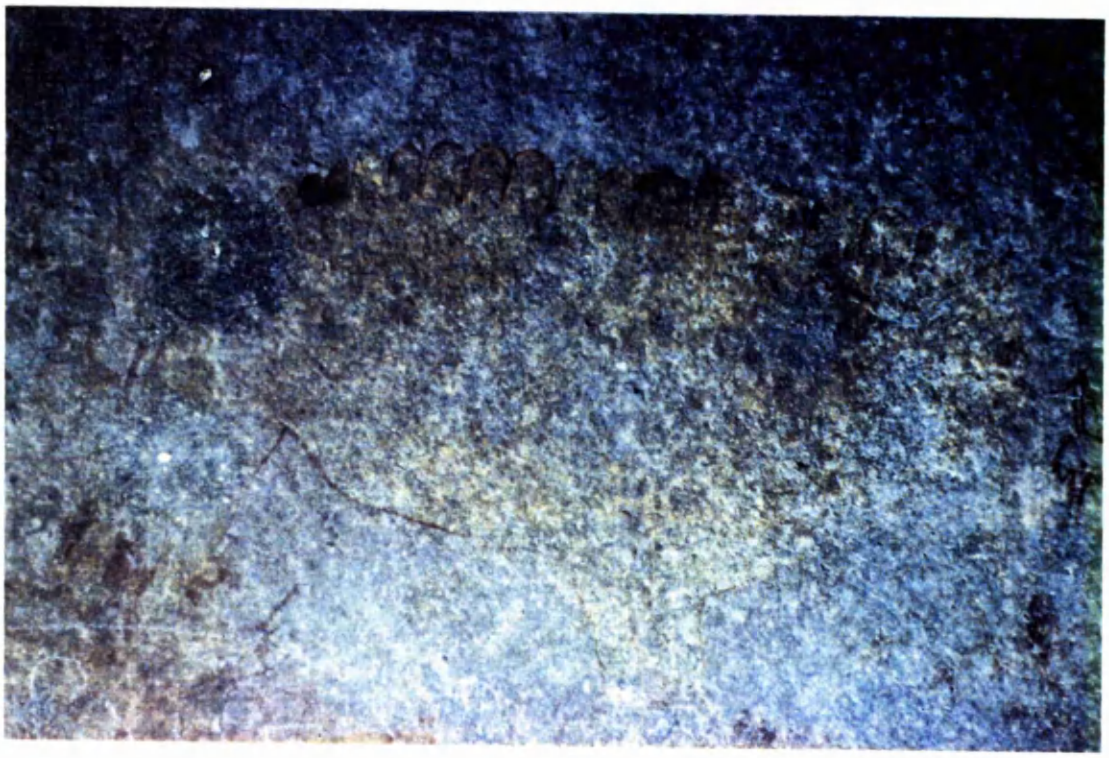

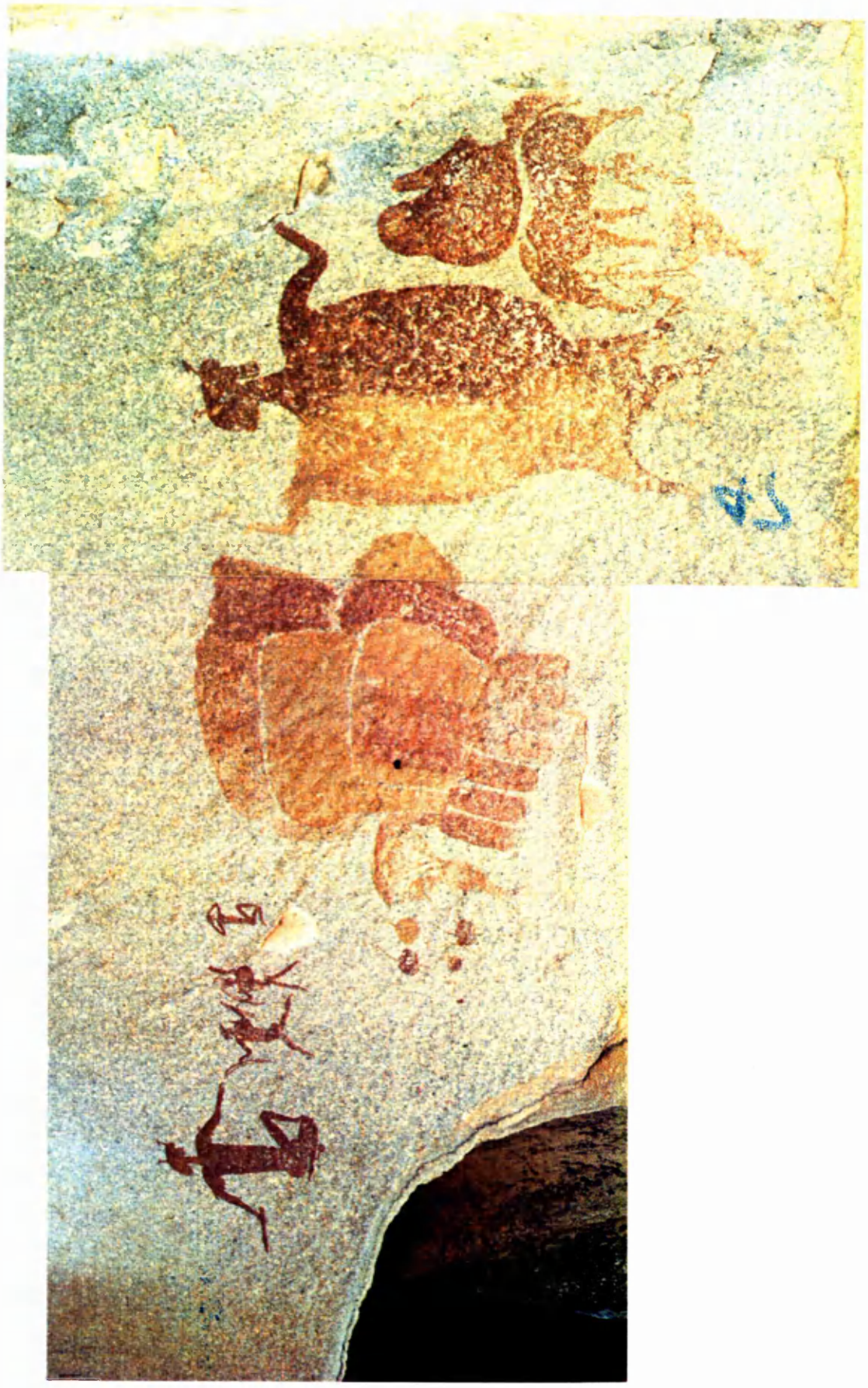

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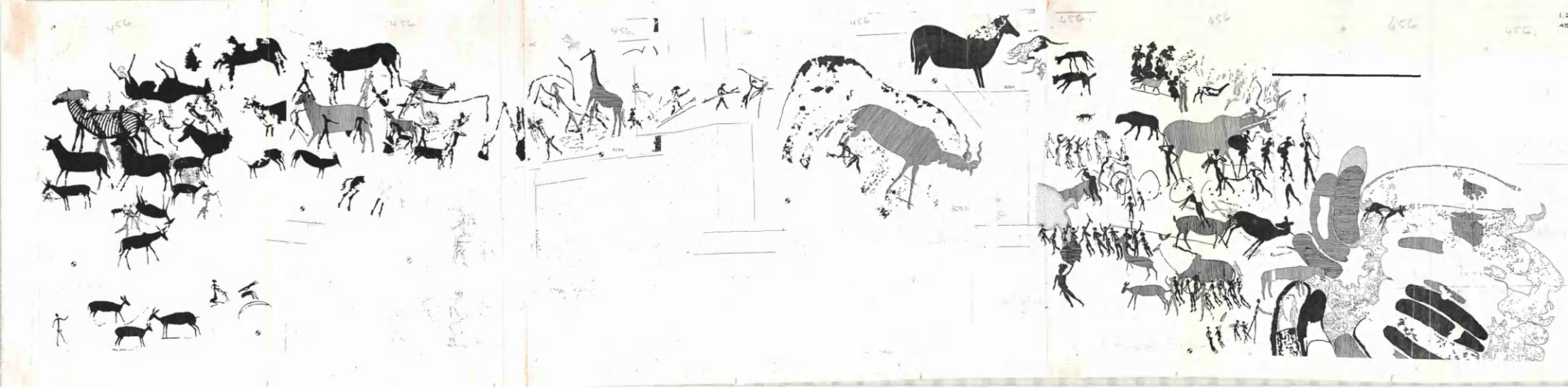

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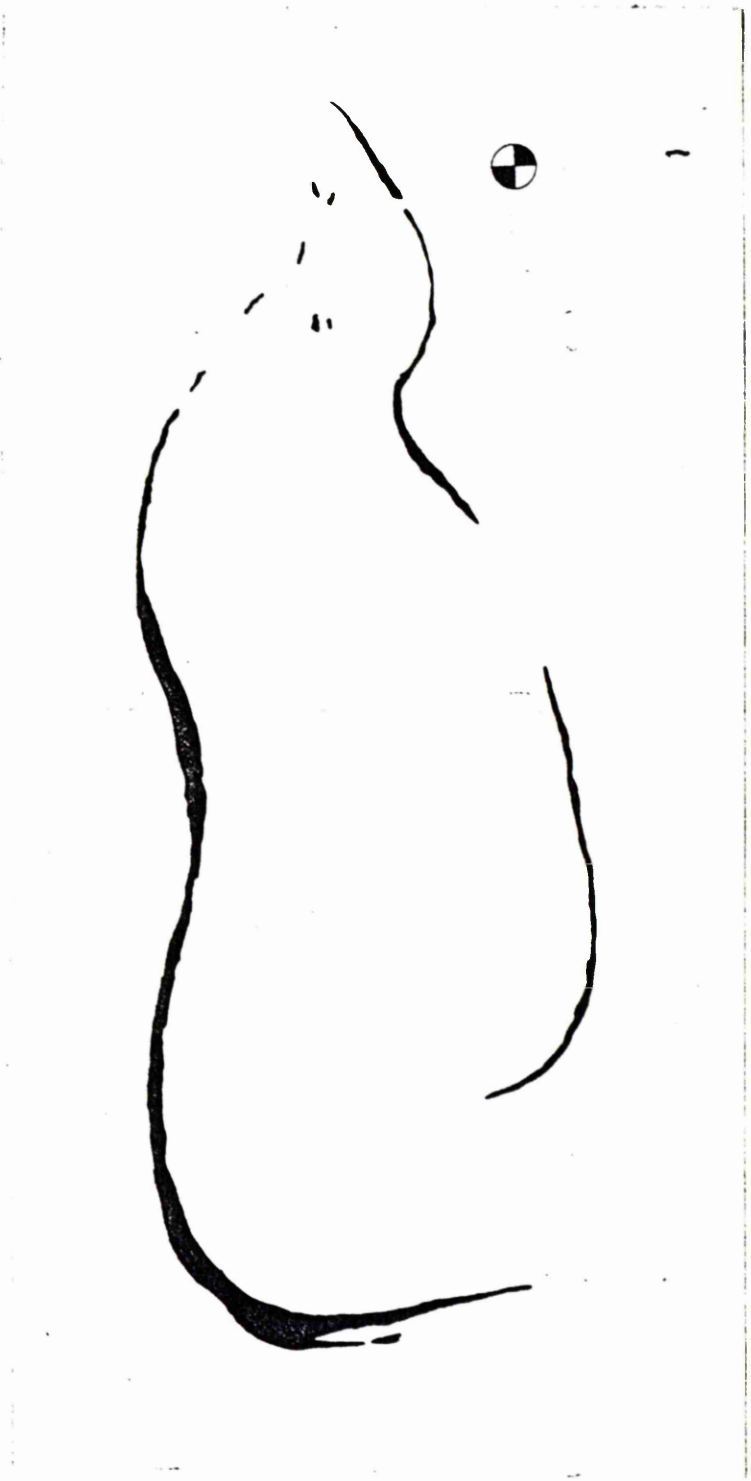

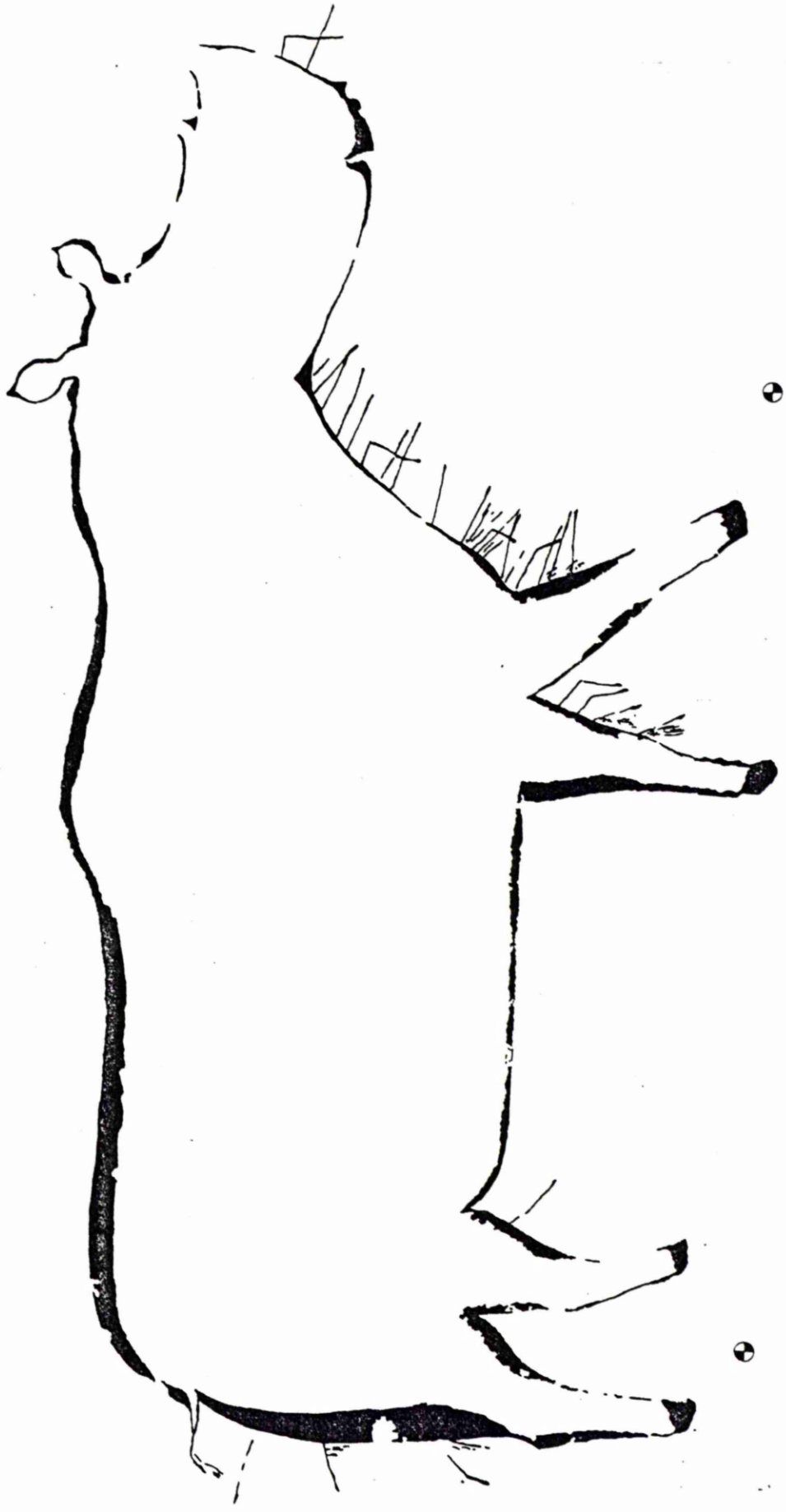

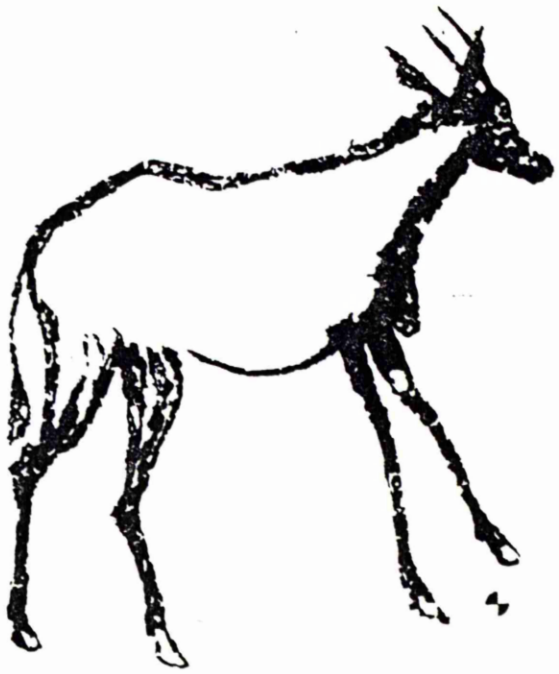

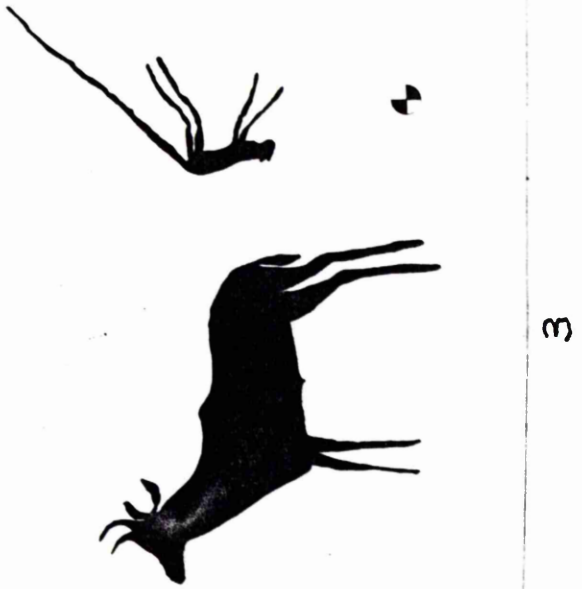

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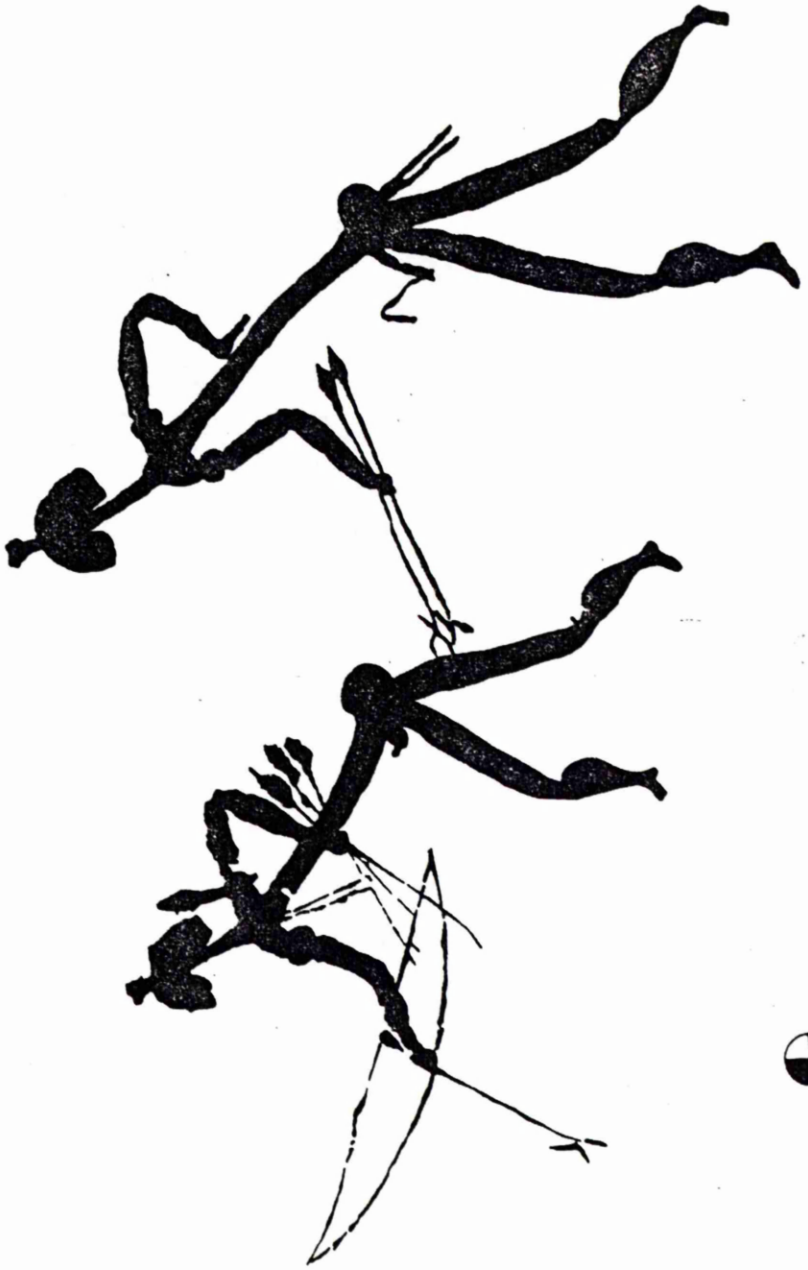

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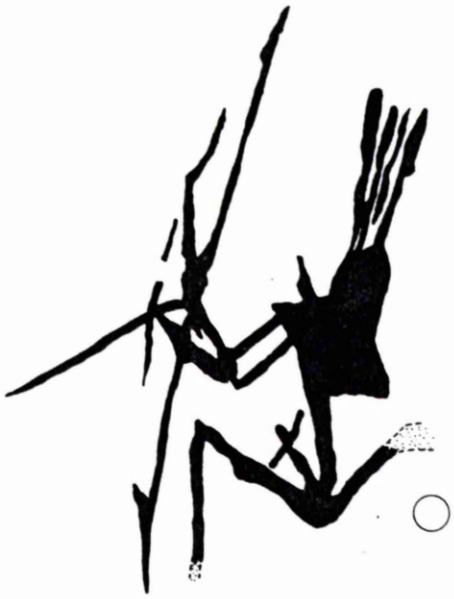

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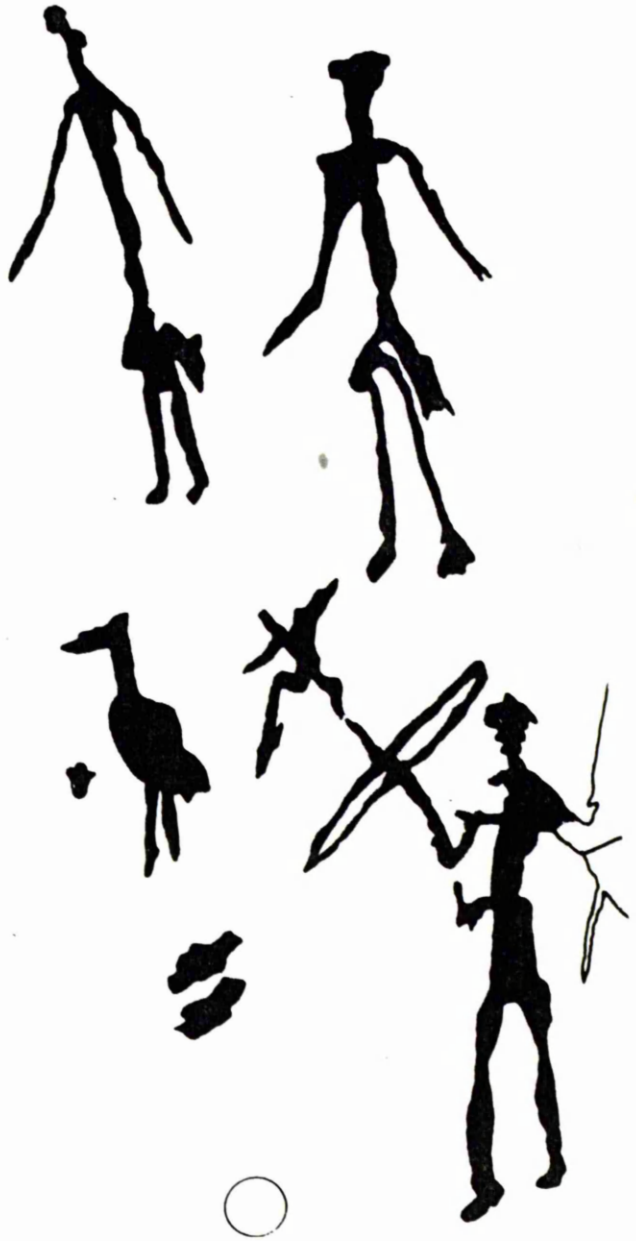

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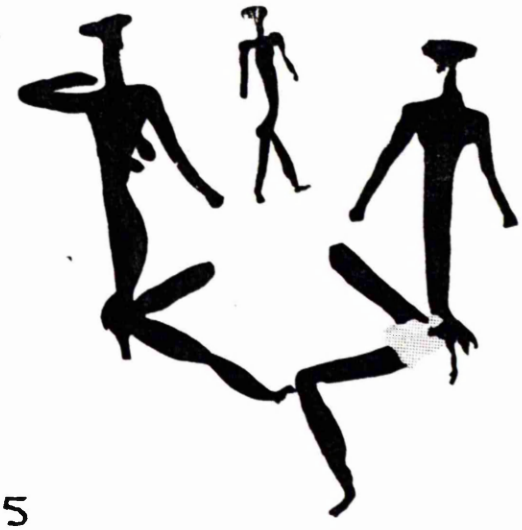

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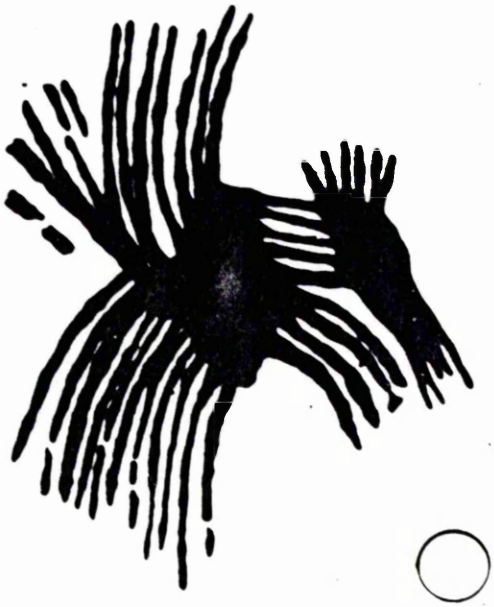

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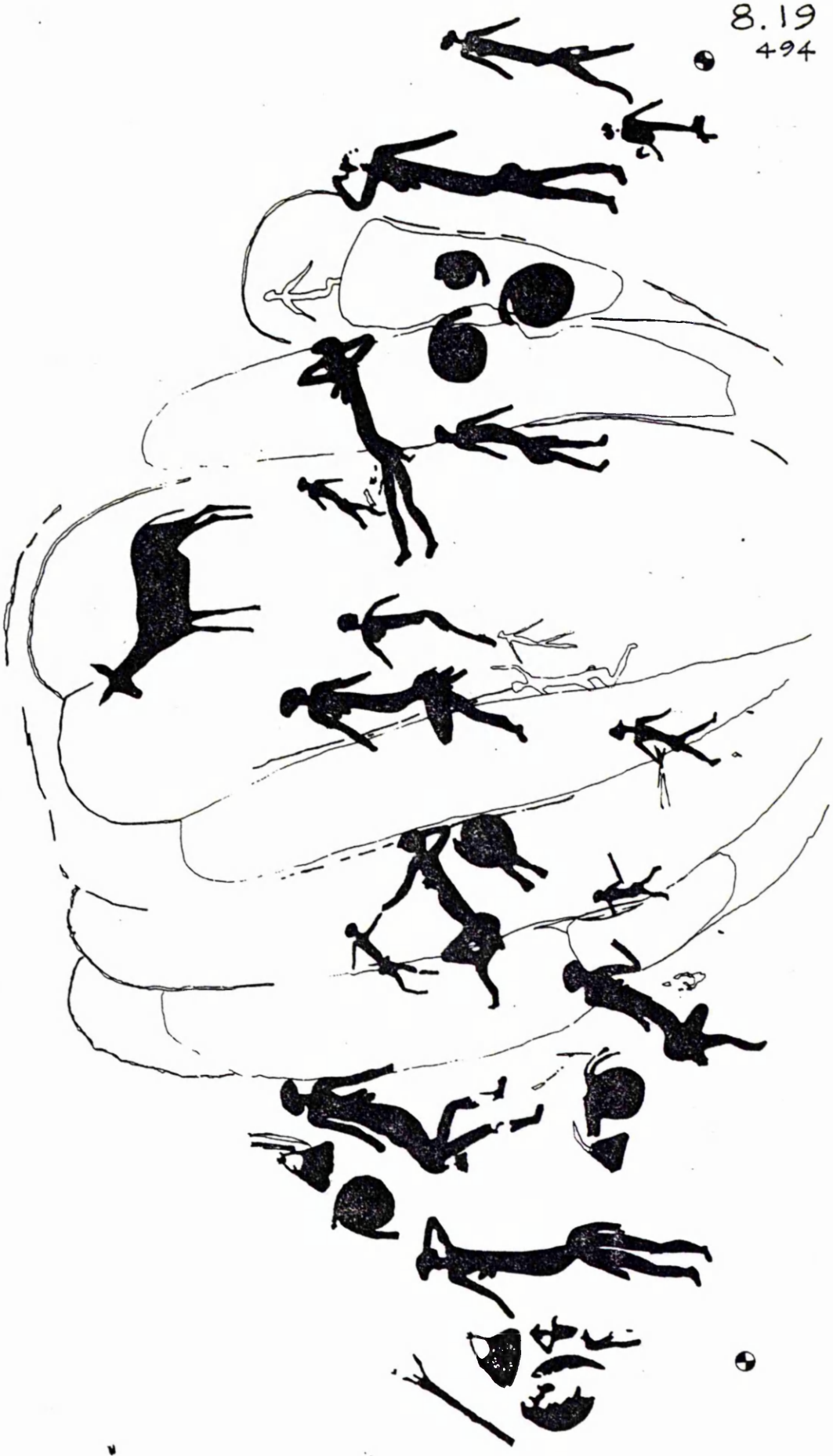

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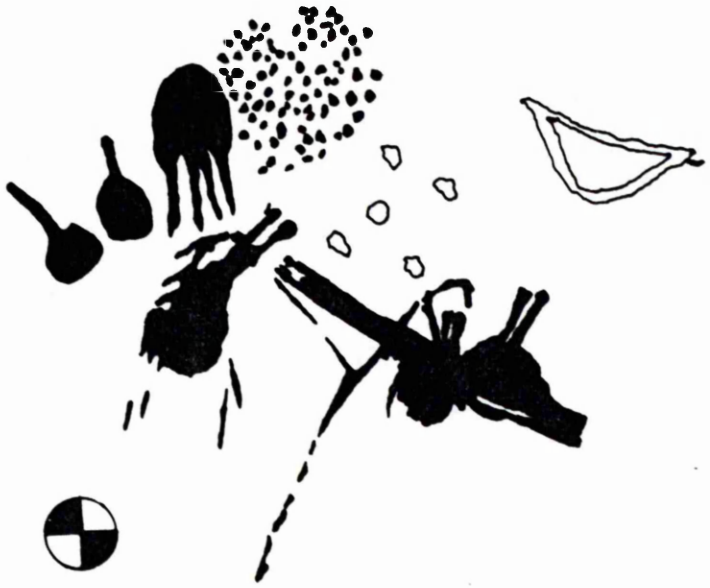

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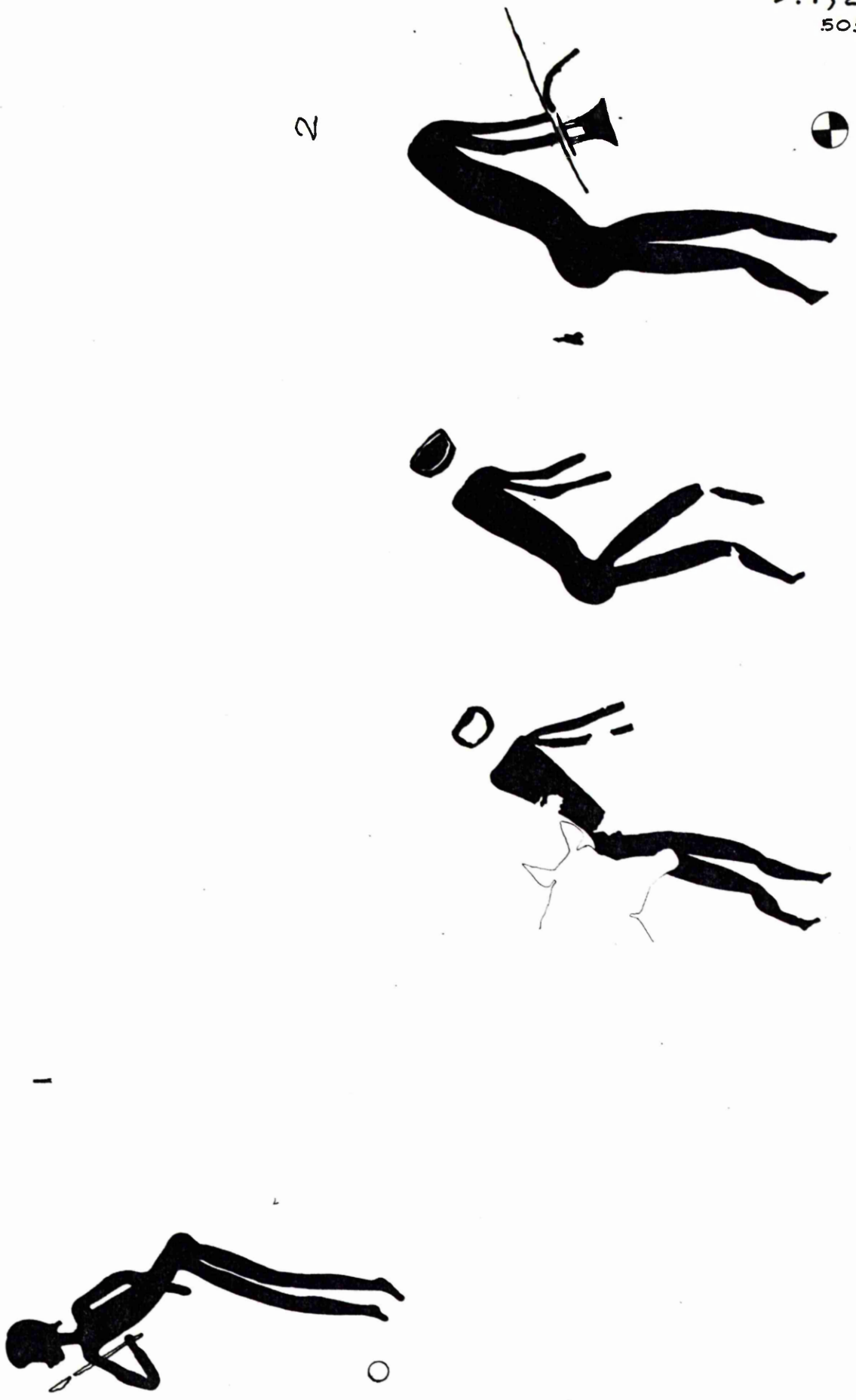

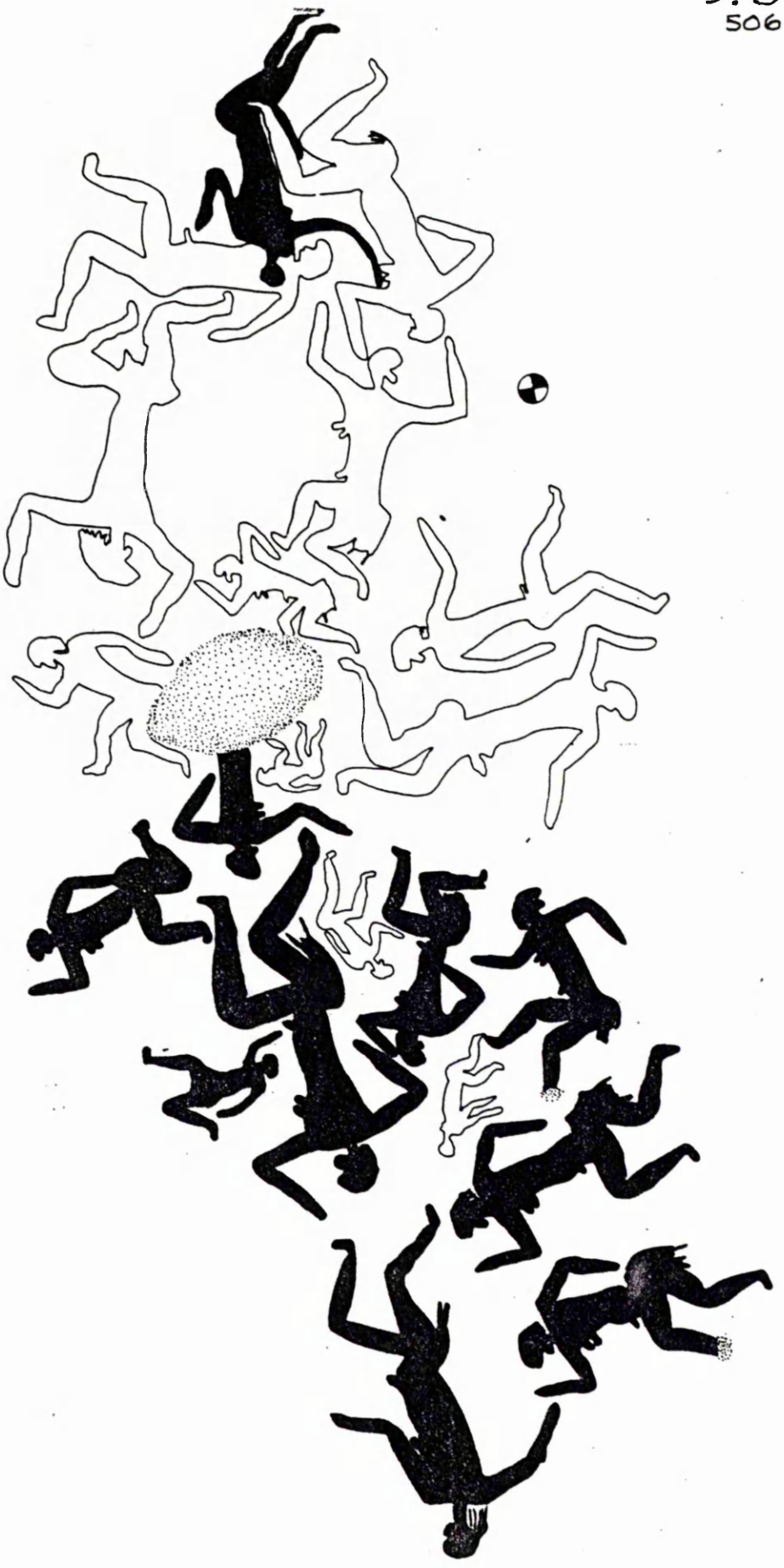

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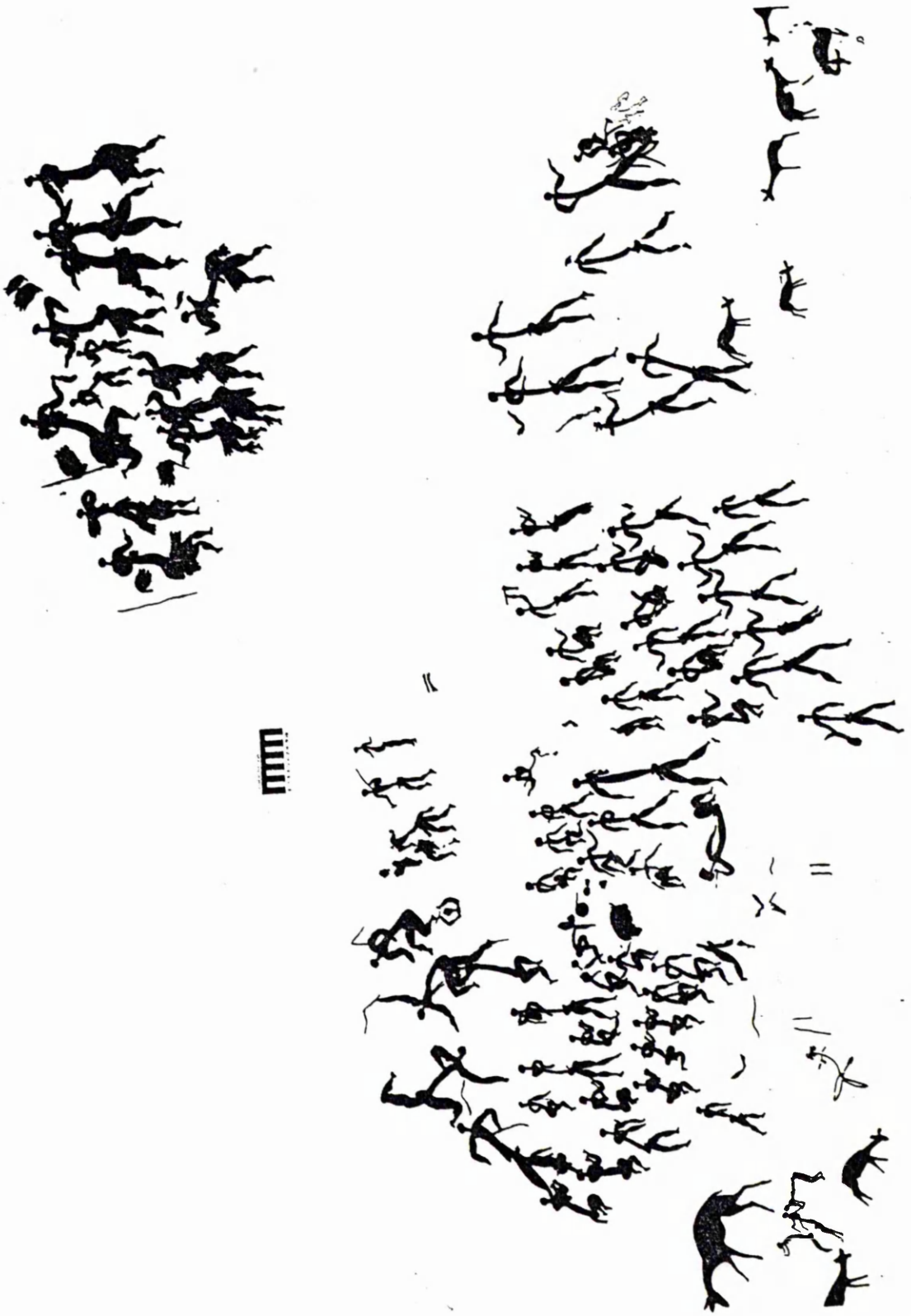

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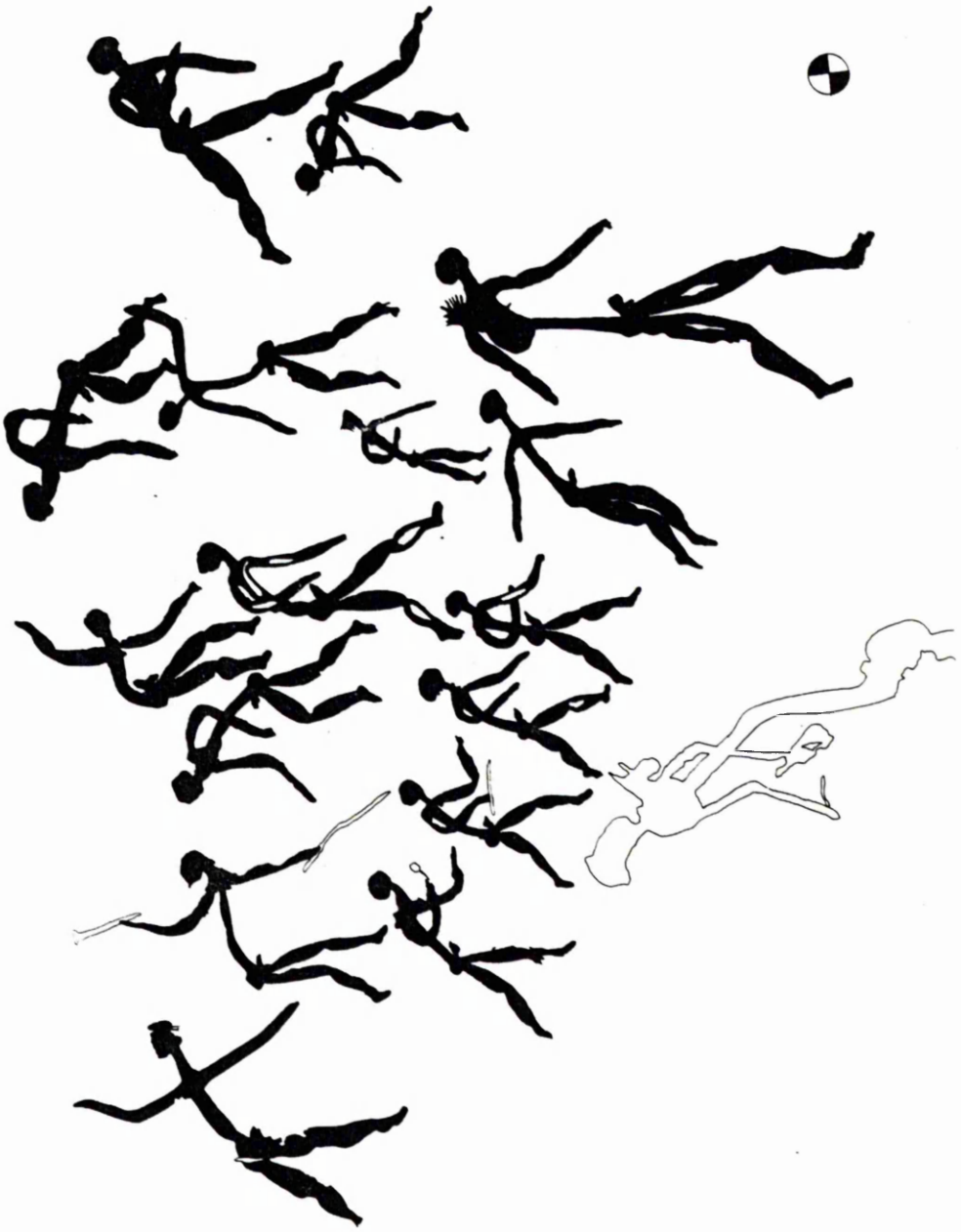

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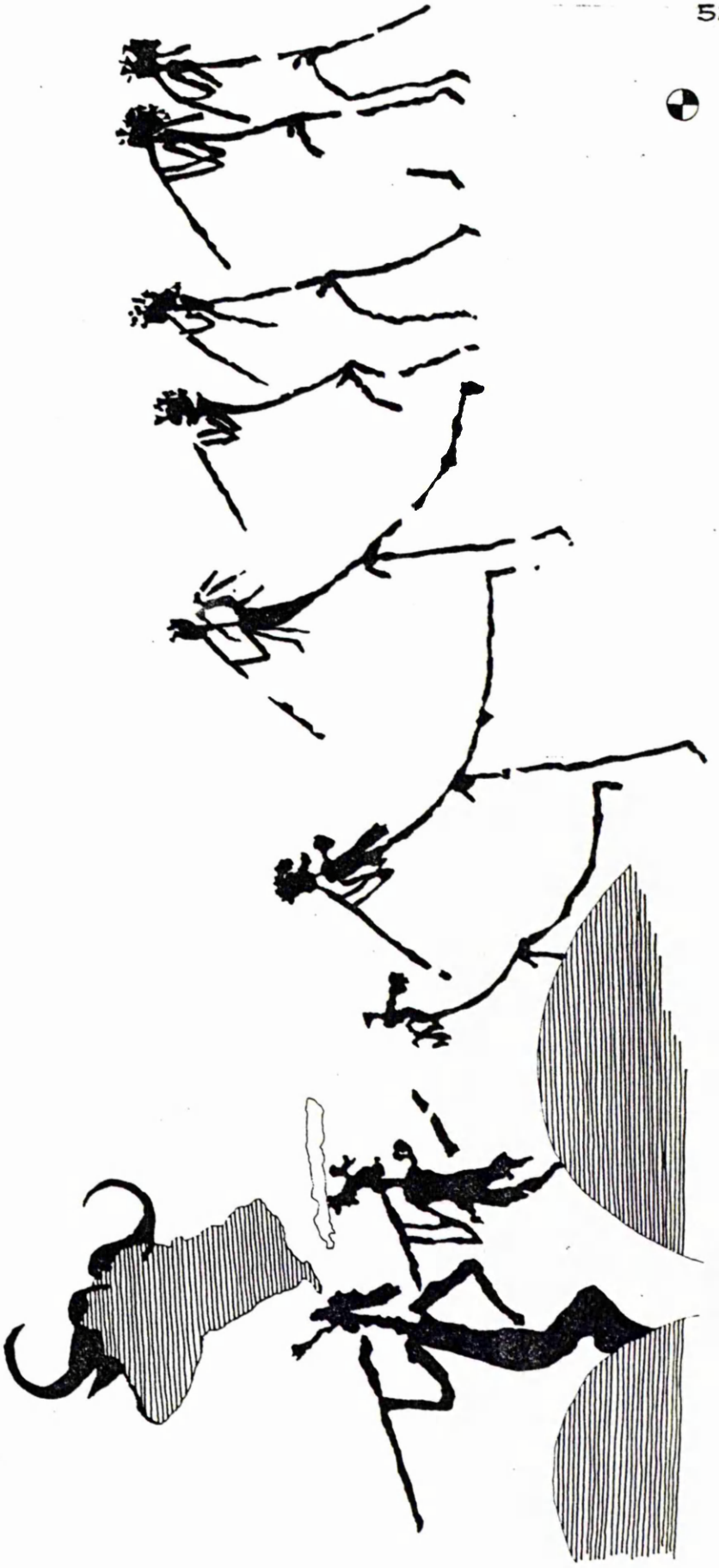

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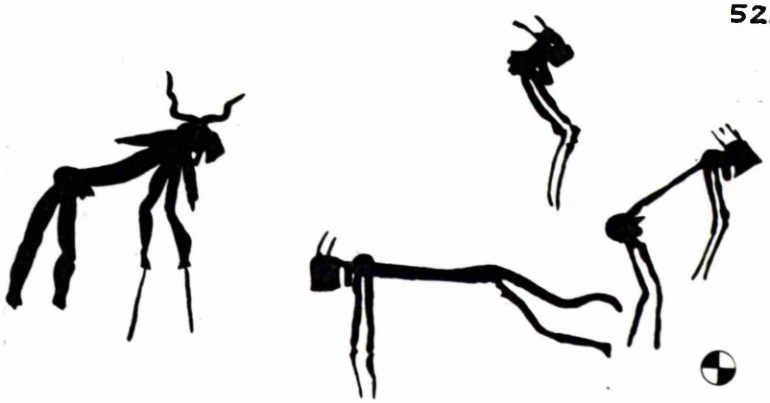

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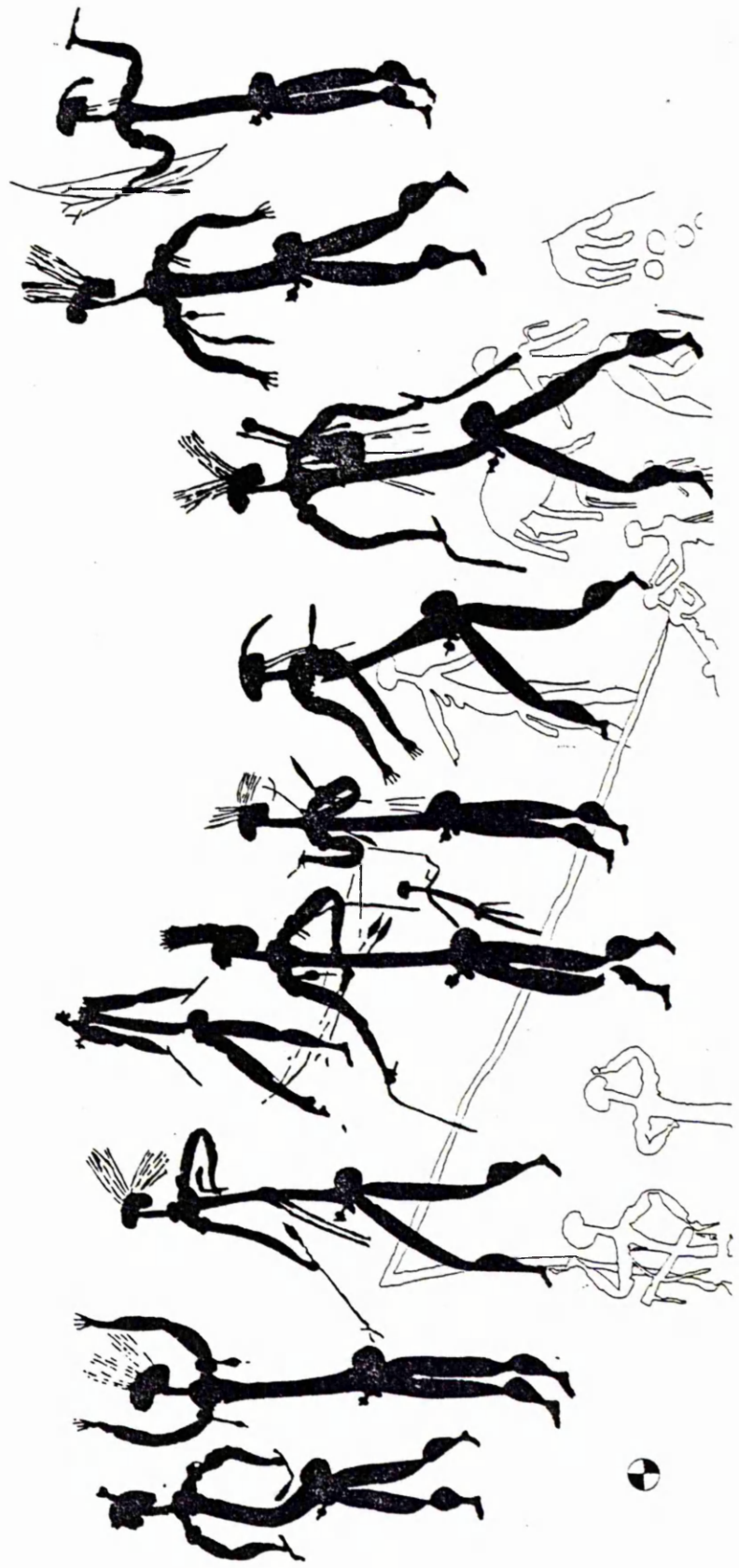

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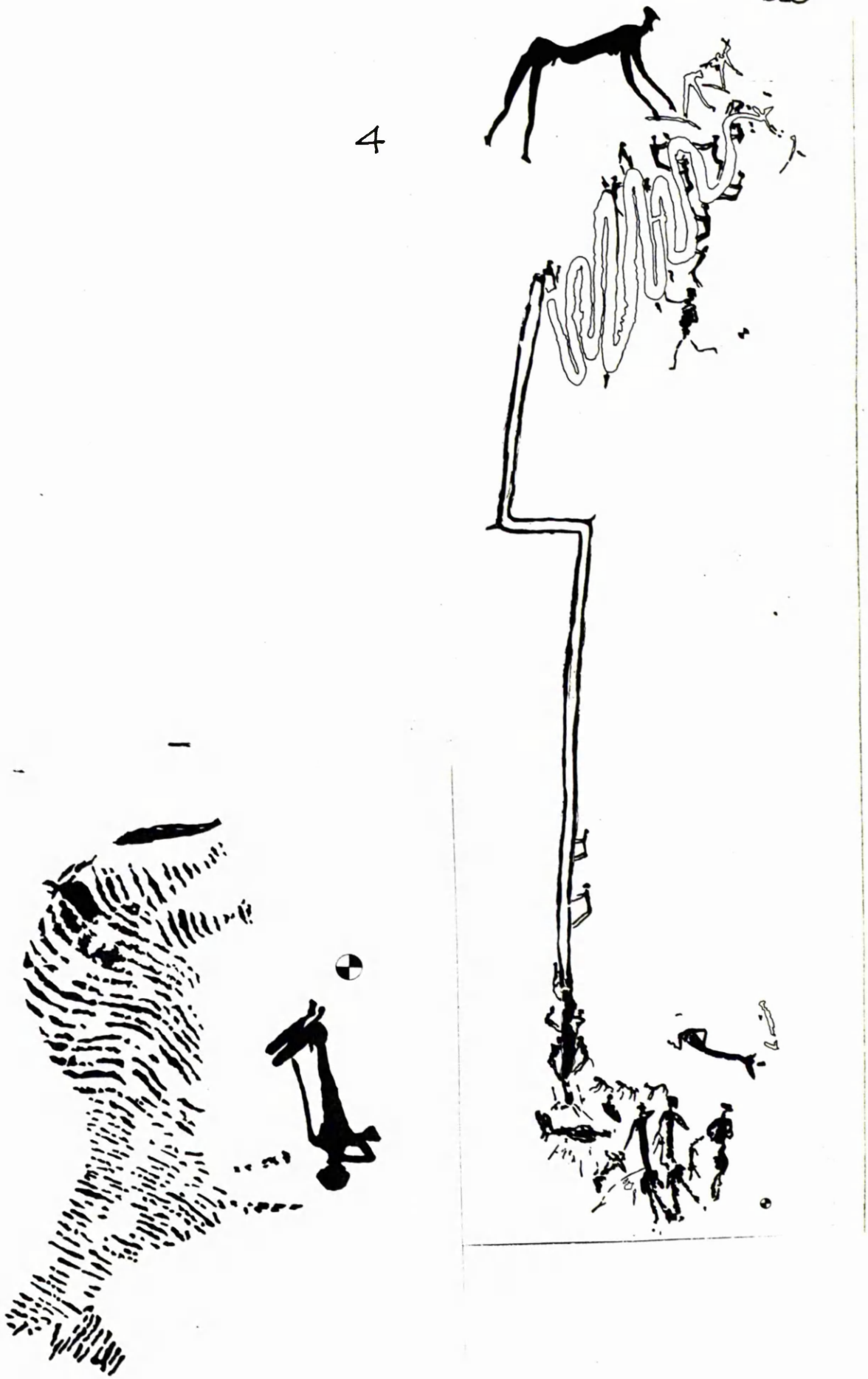

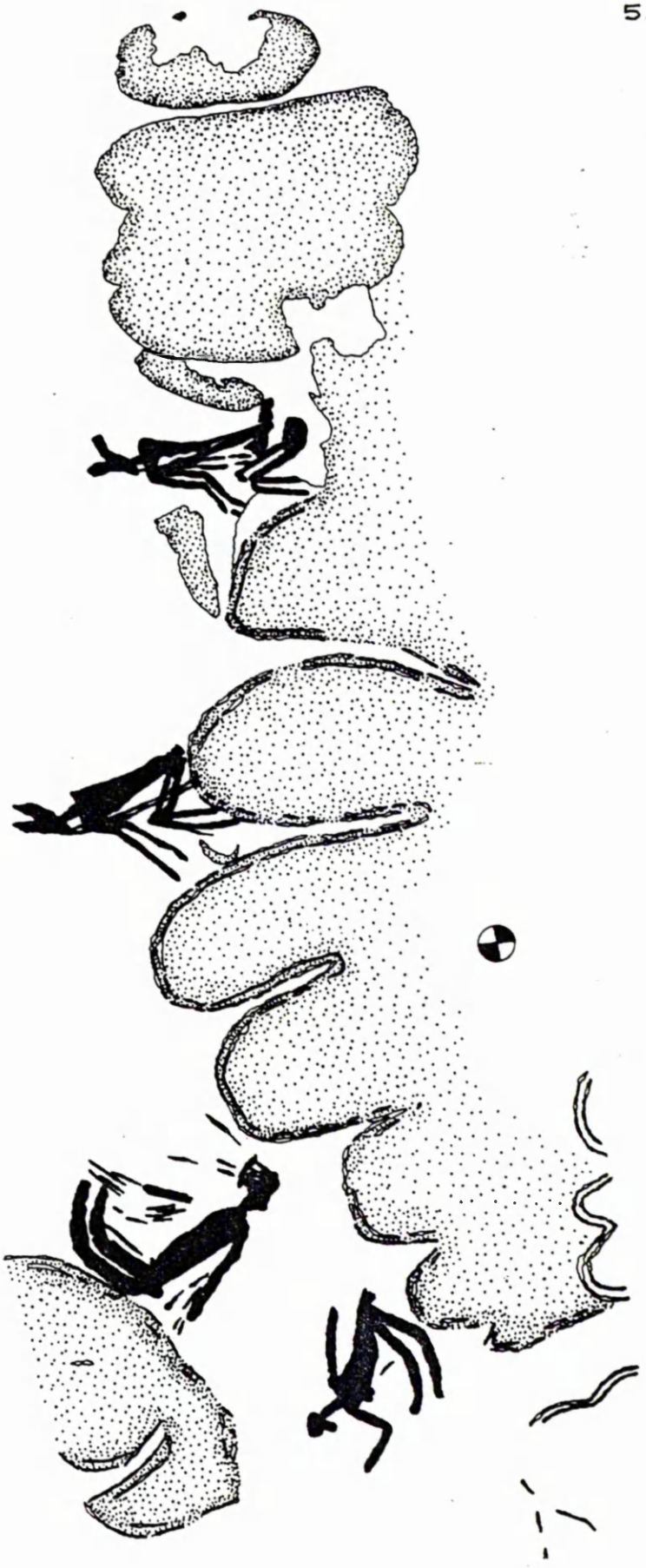

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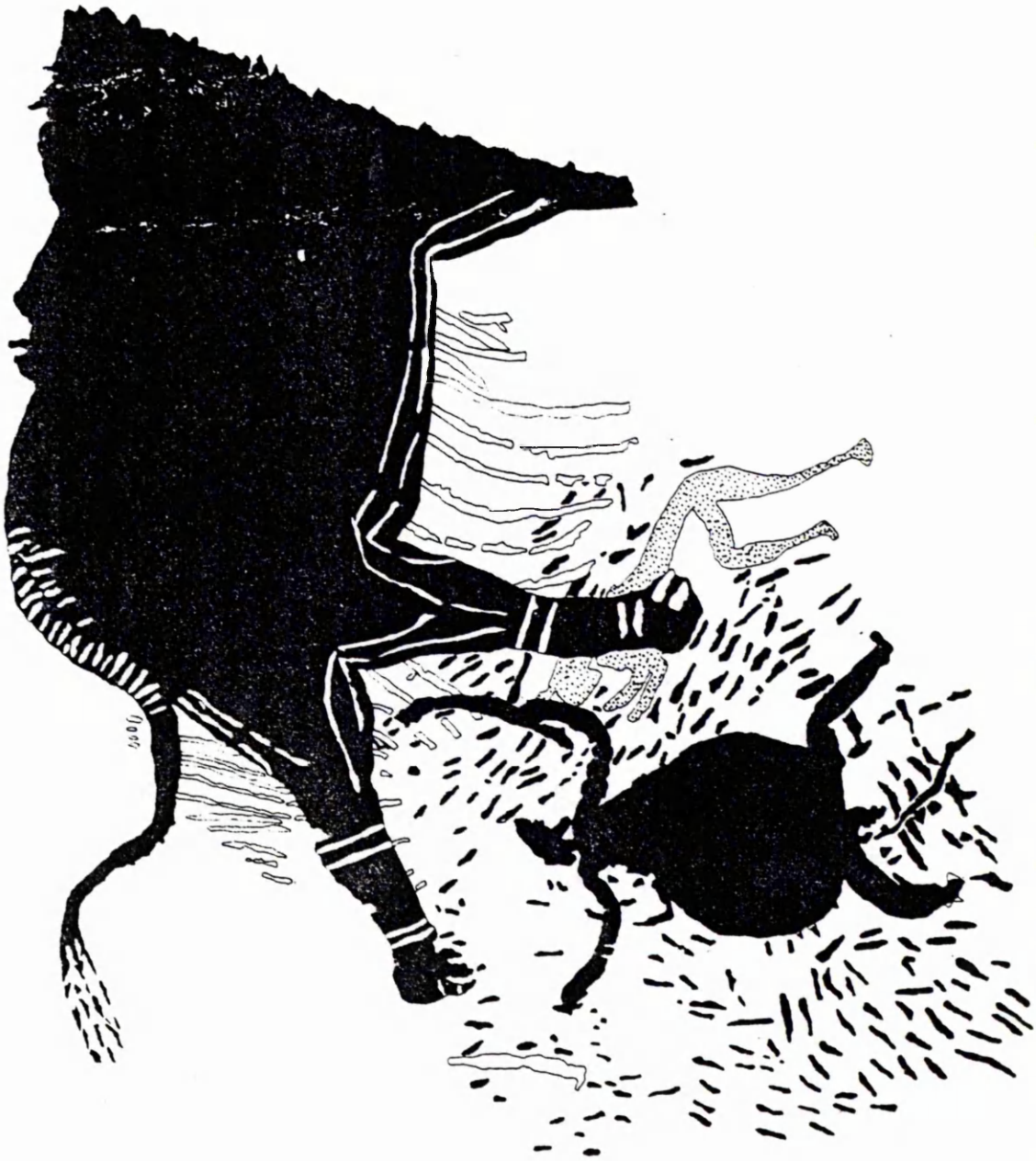

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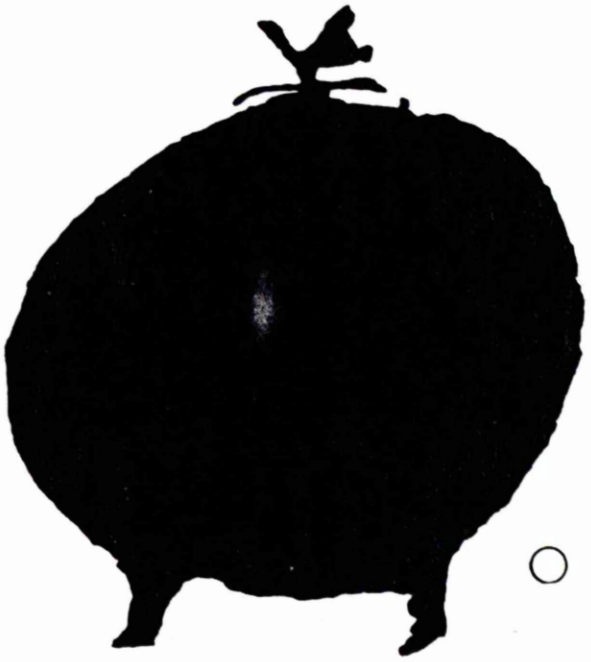

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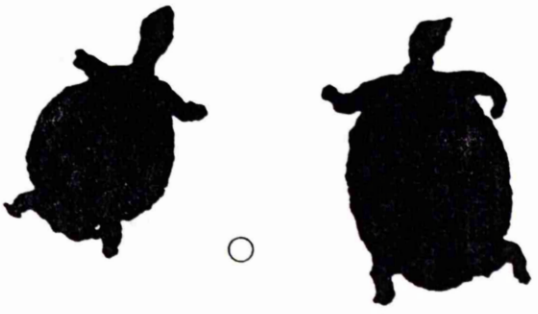

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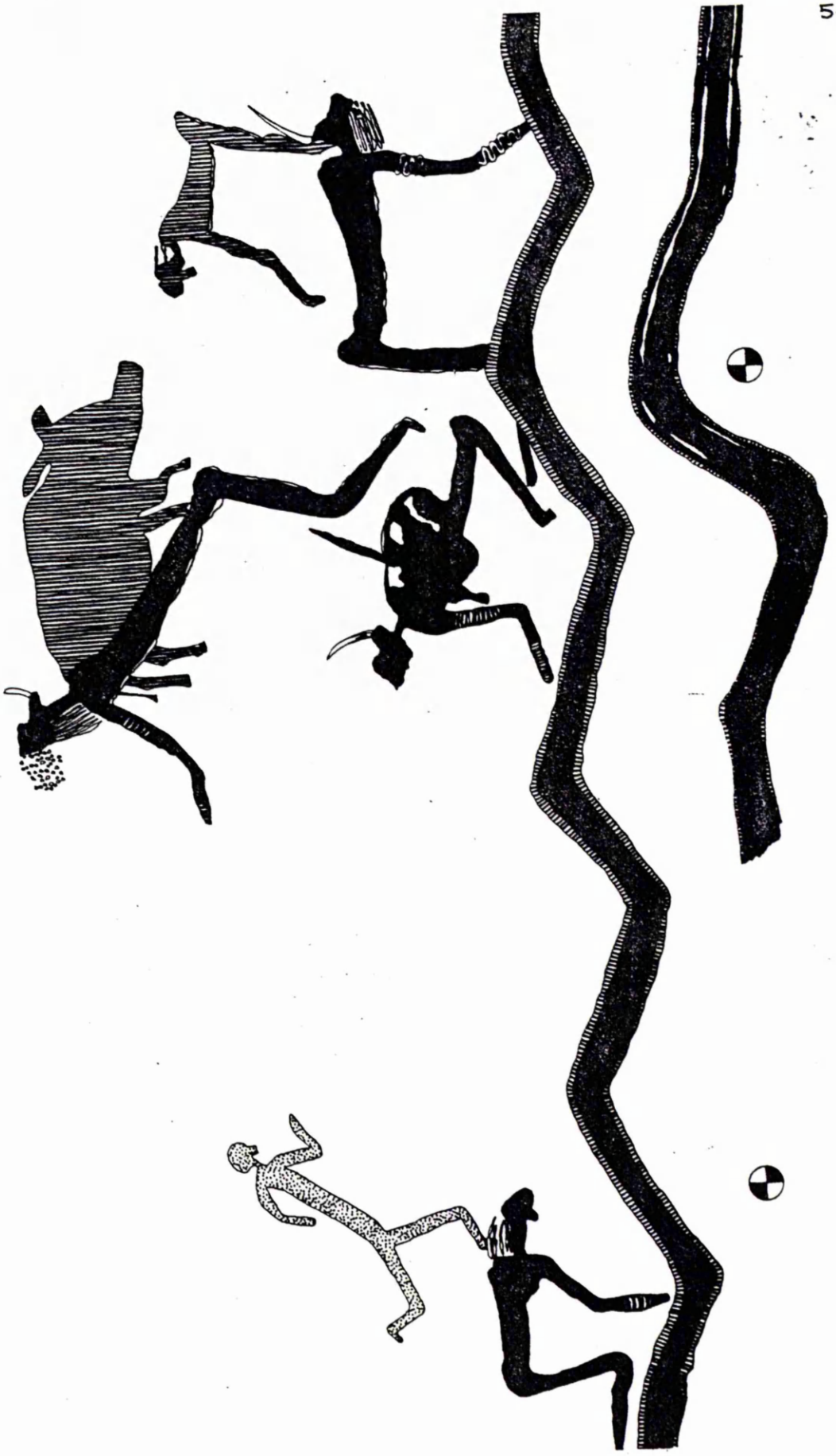

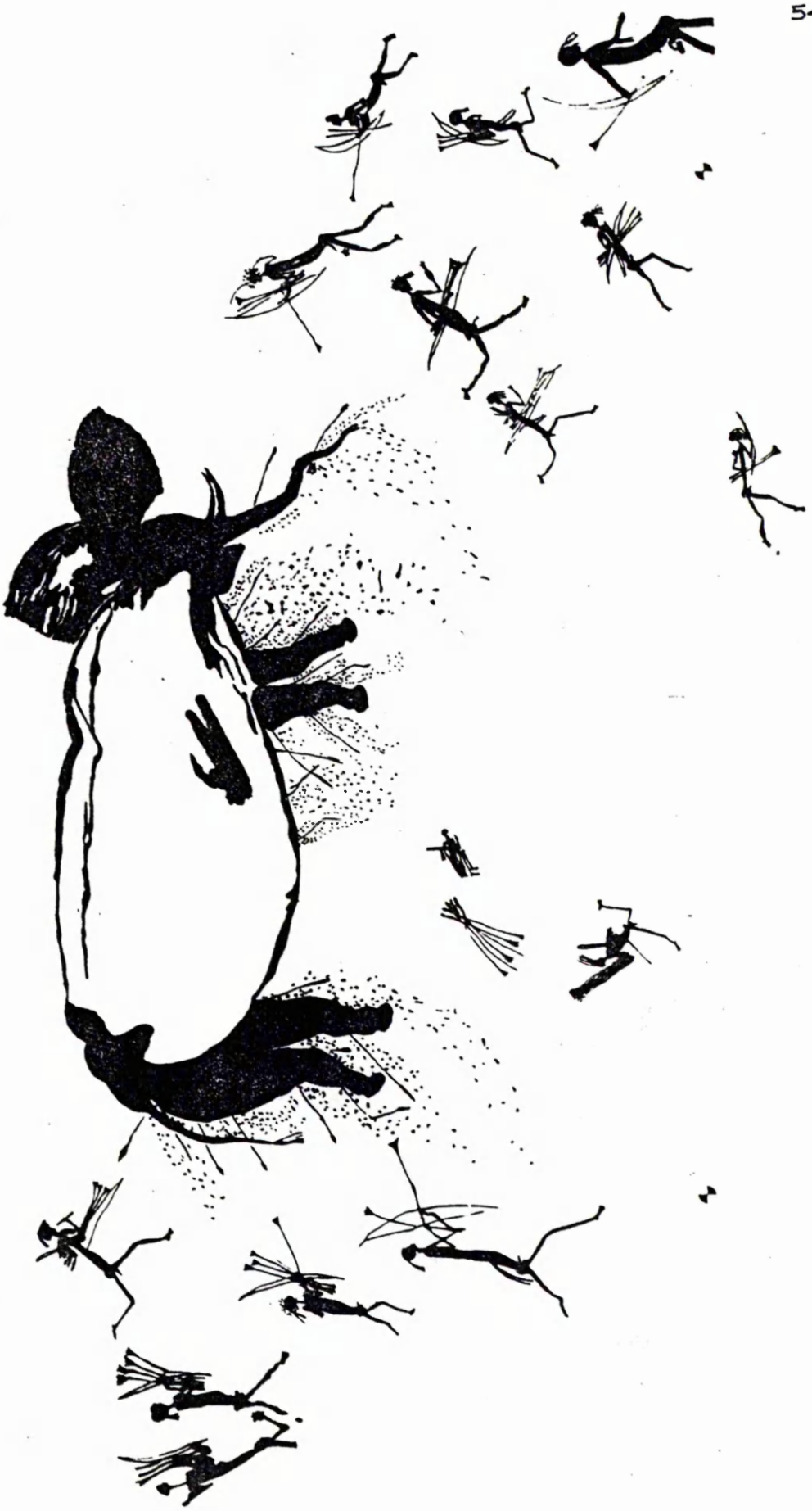

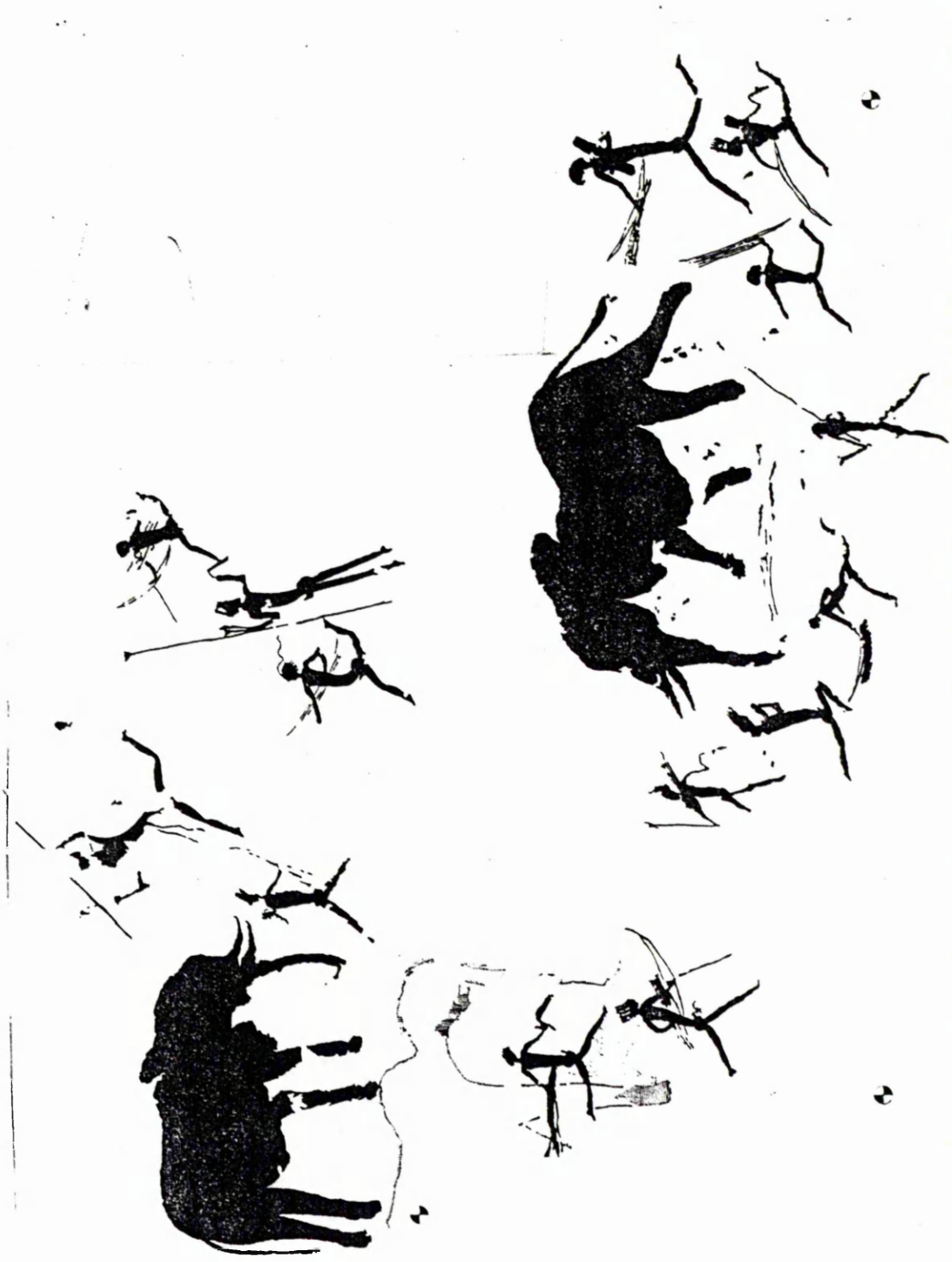

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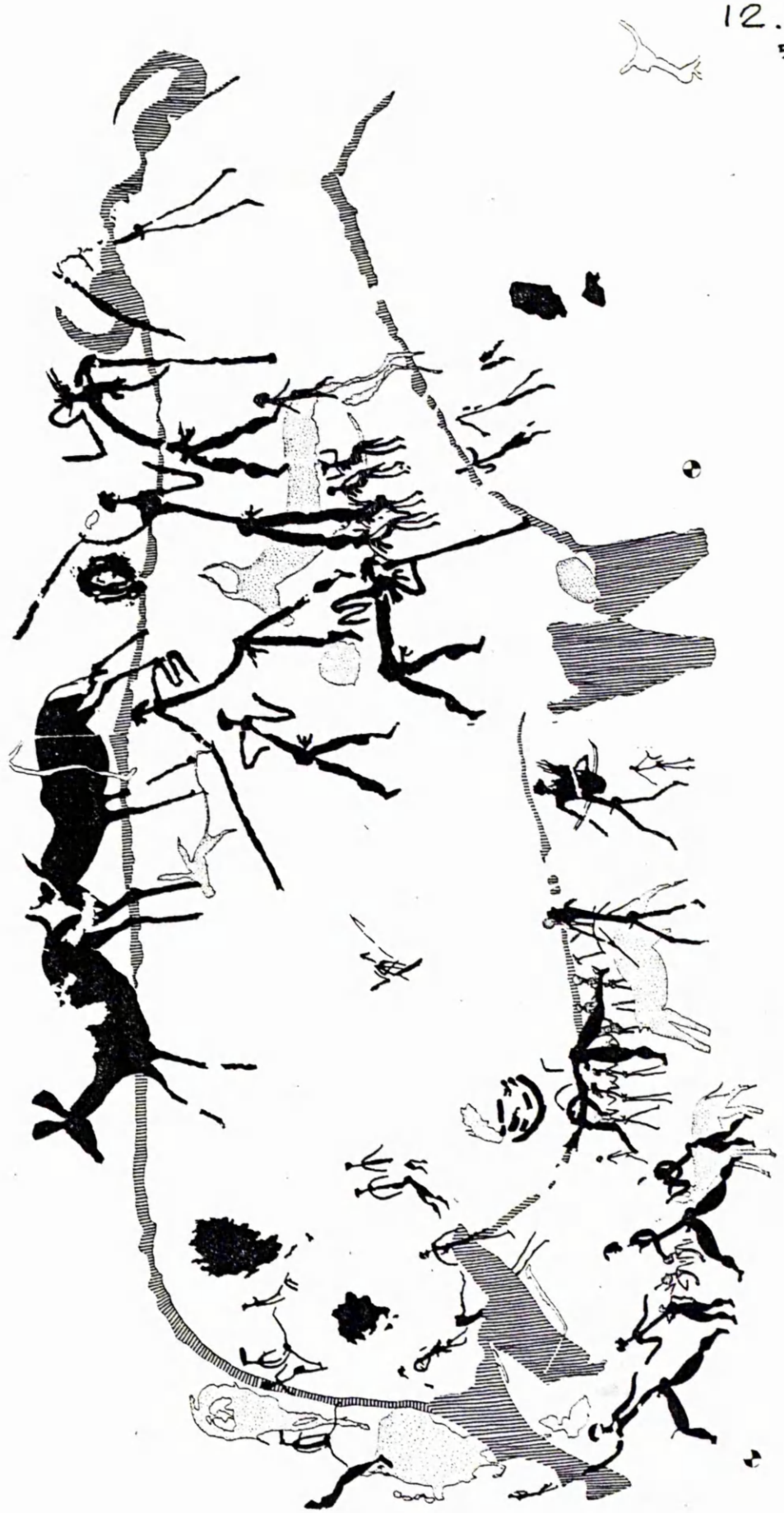

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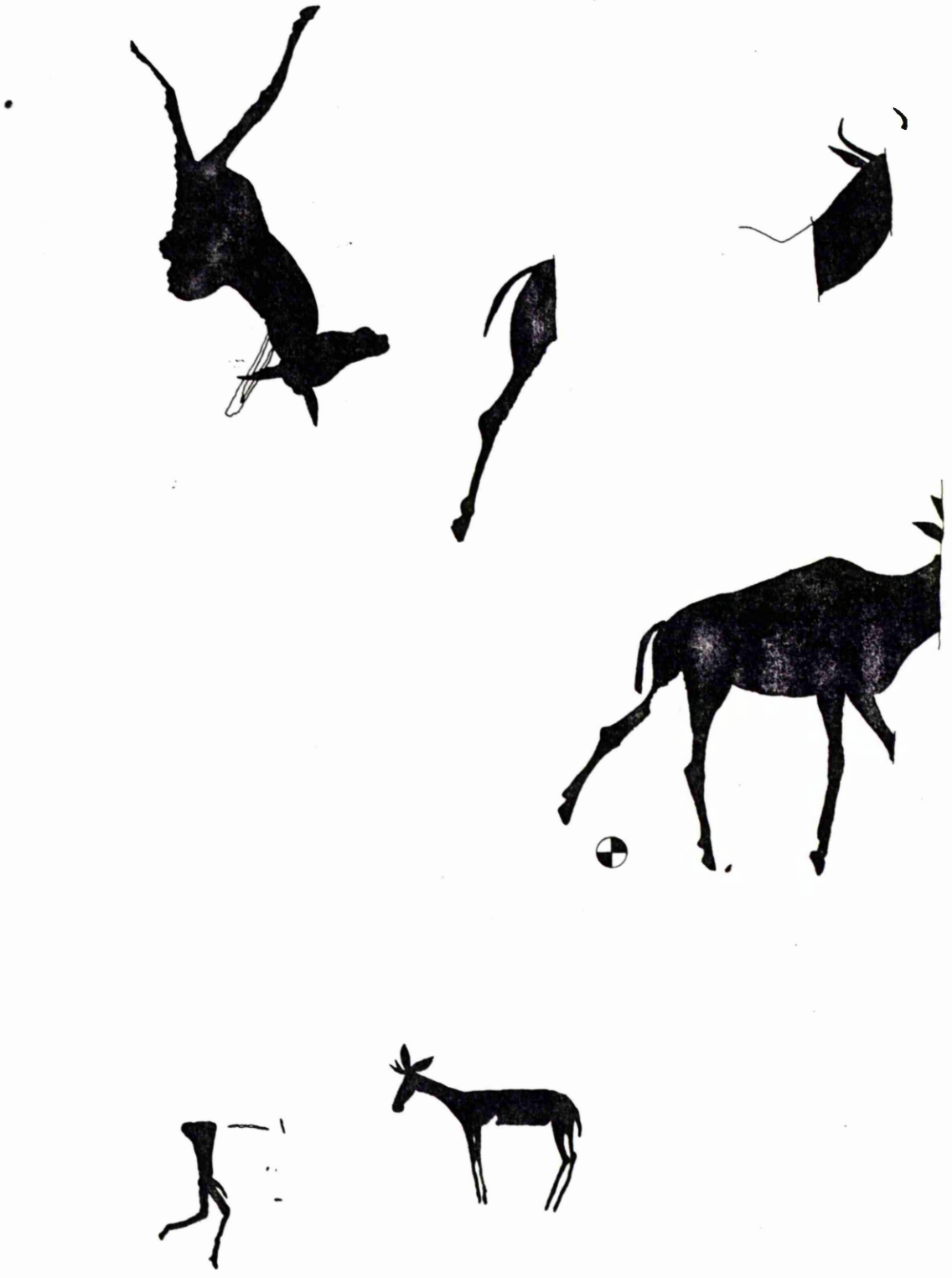

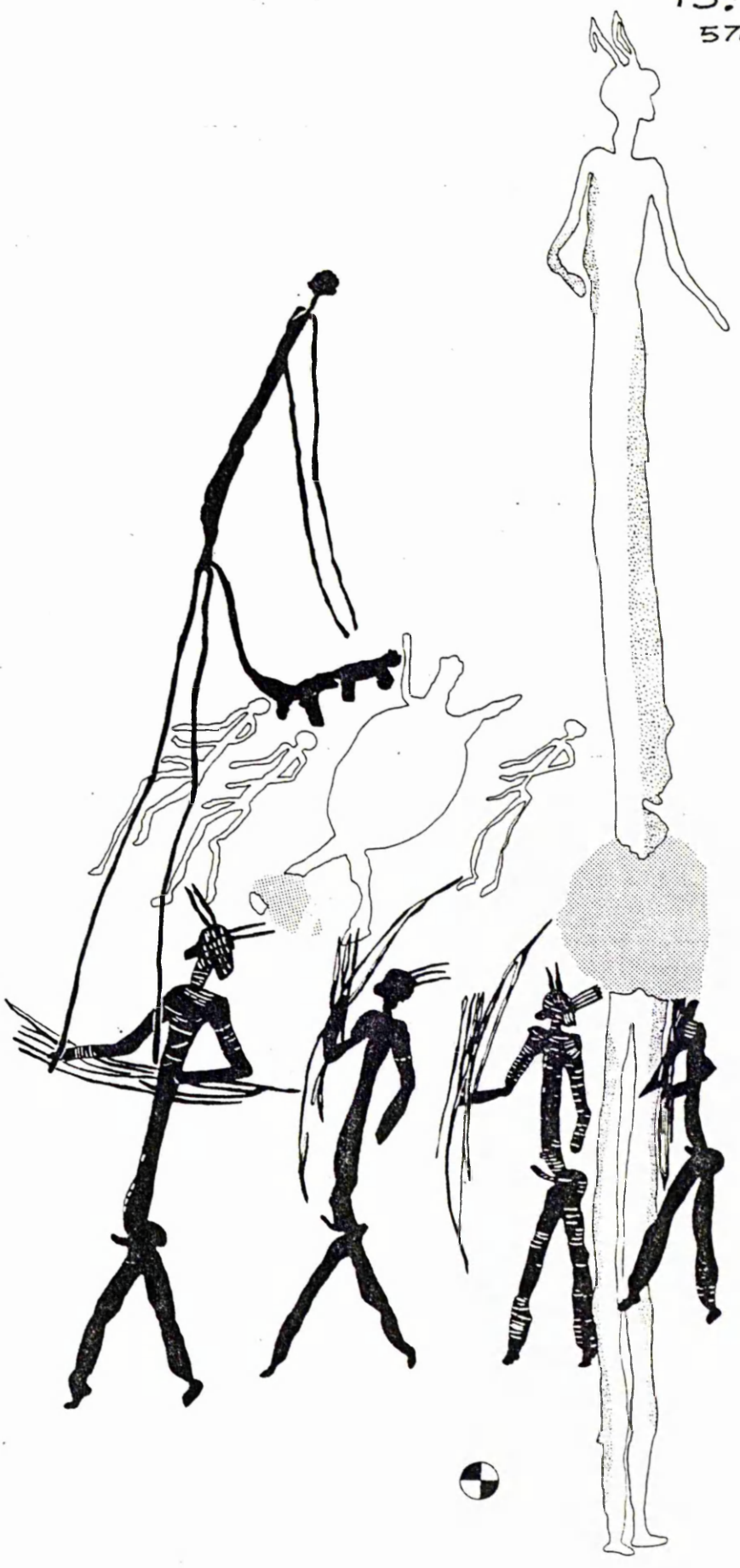

1.

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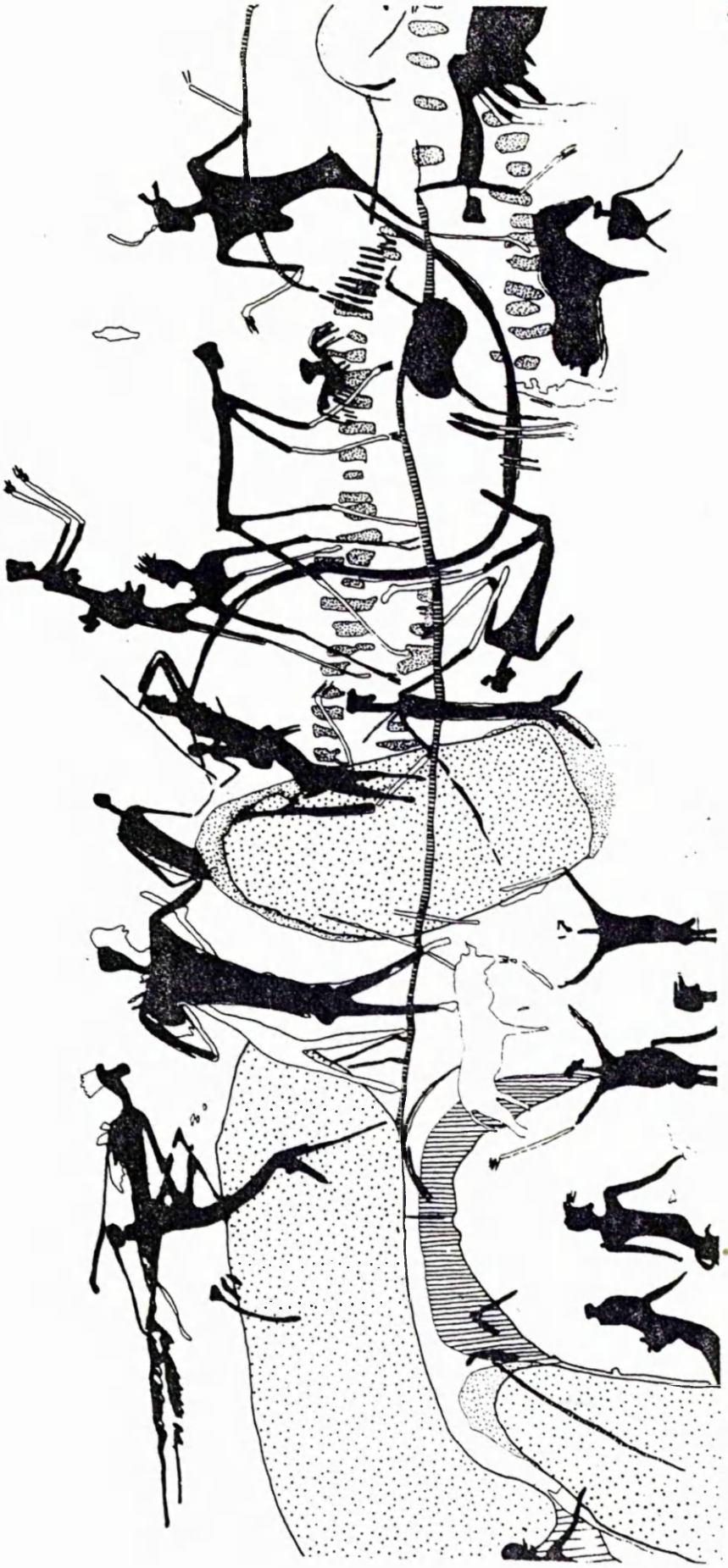

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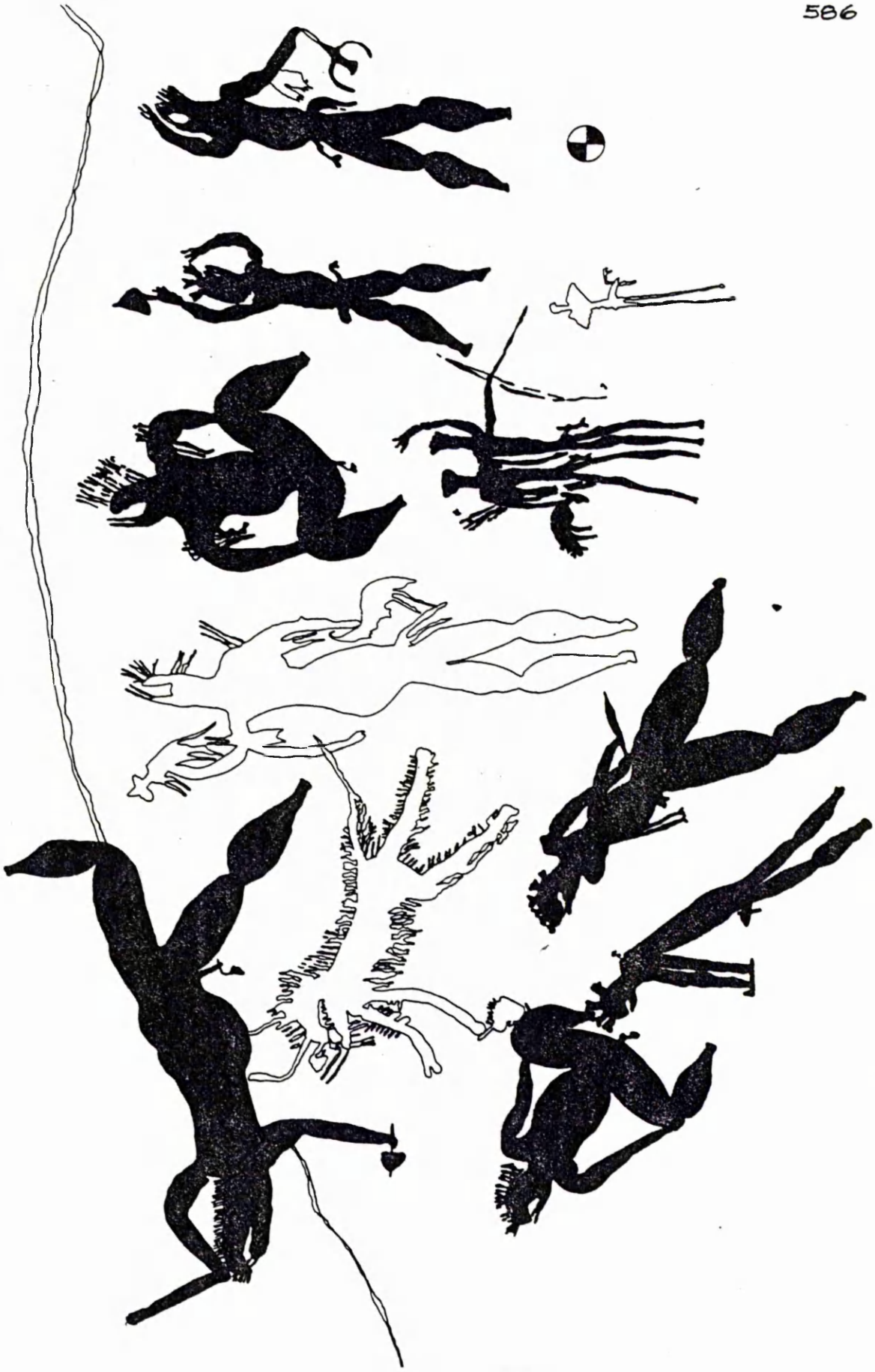
13.12
586



13.15-17
588

17

15

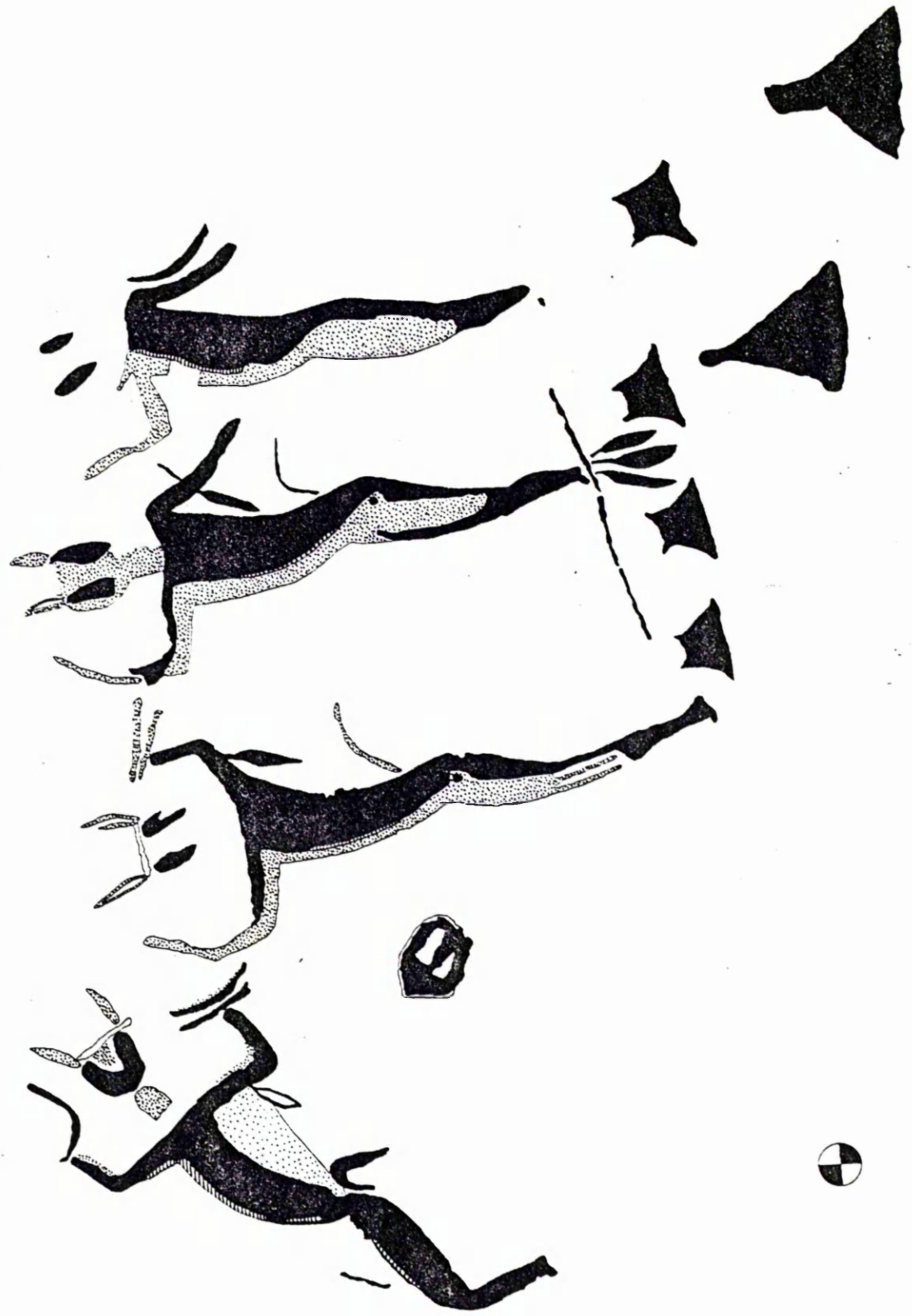
16

13.19, 23-4
590

19

23

24



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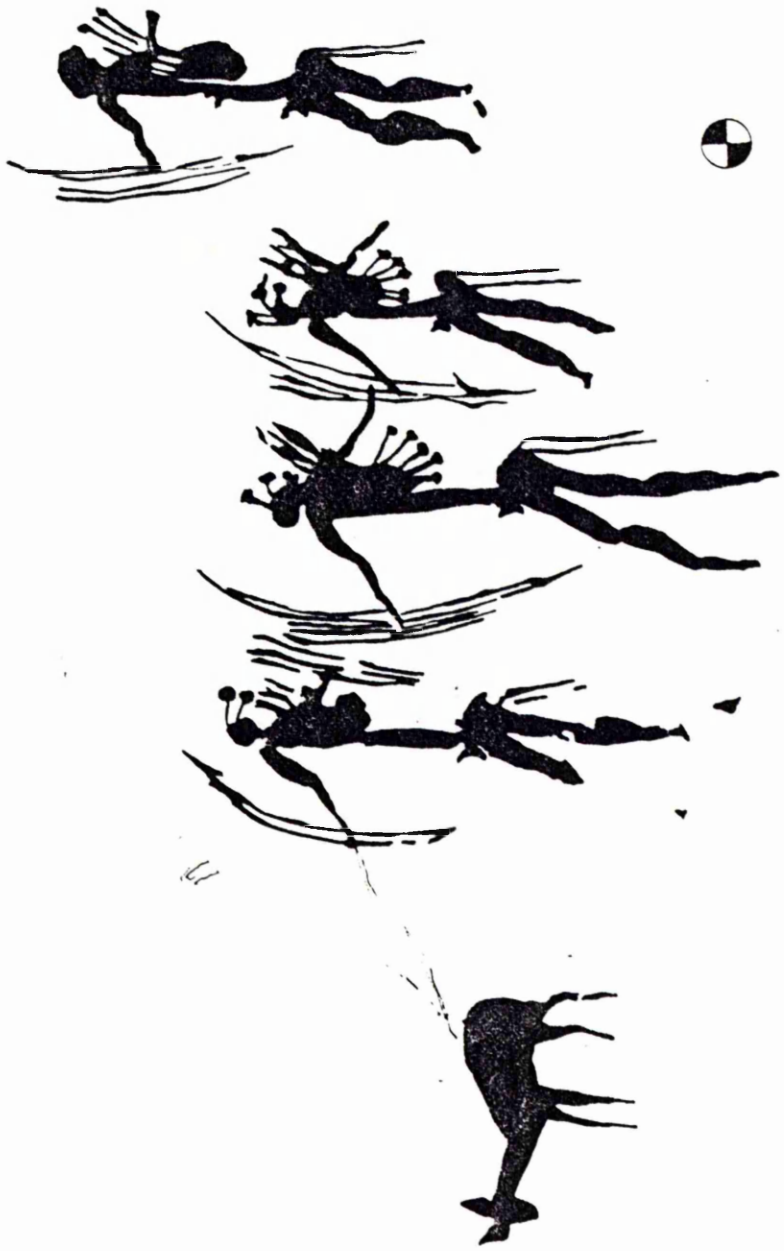
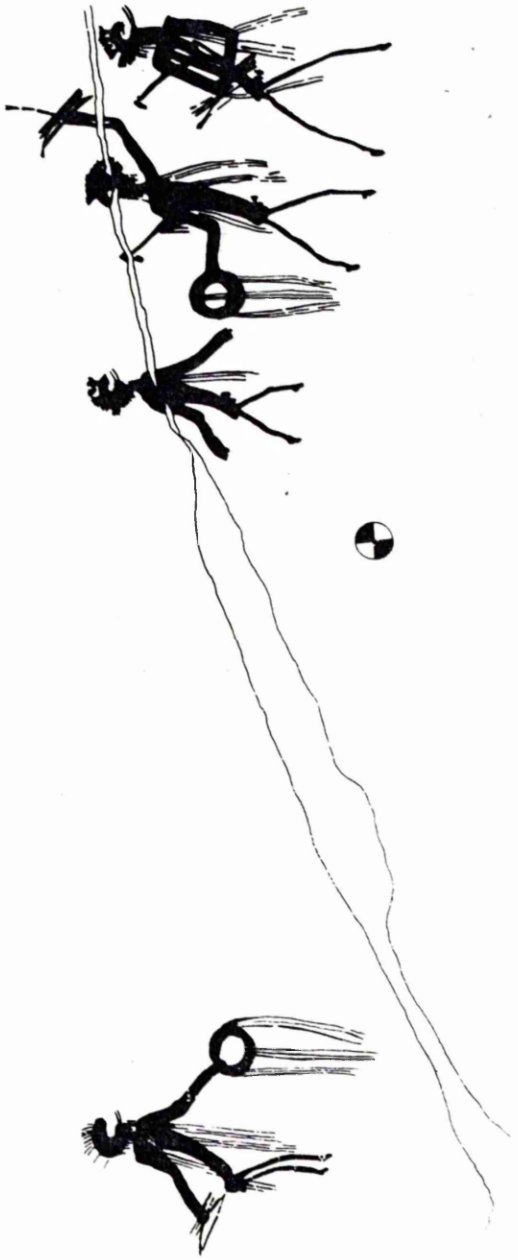
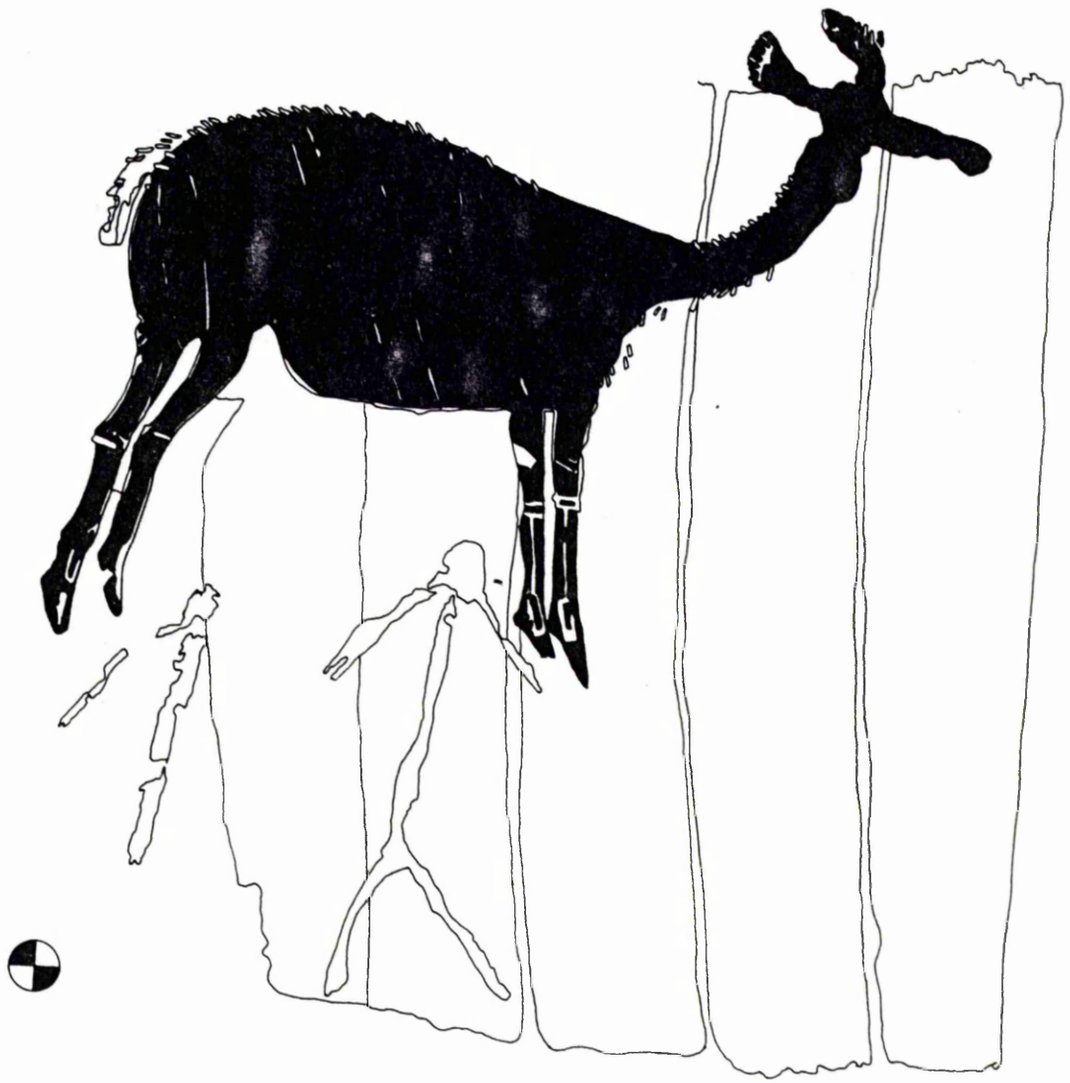


14. 10
600





14. 14, 15
604

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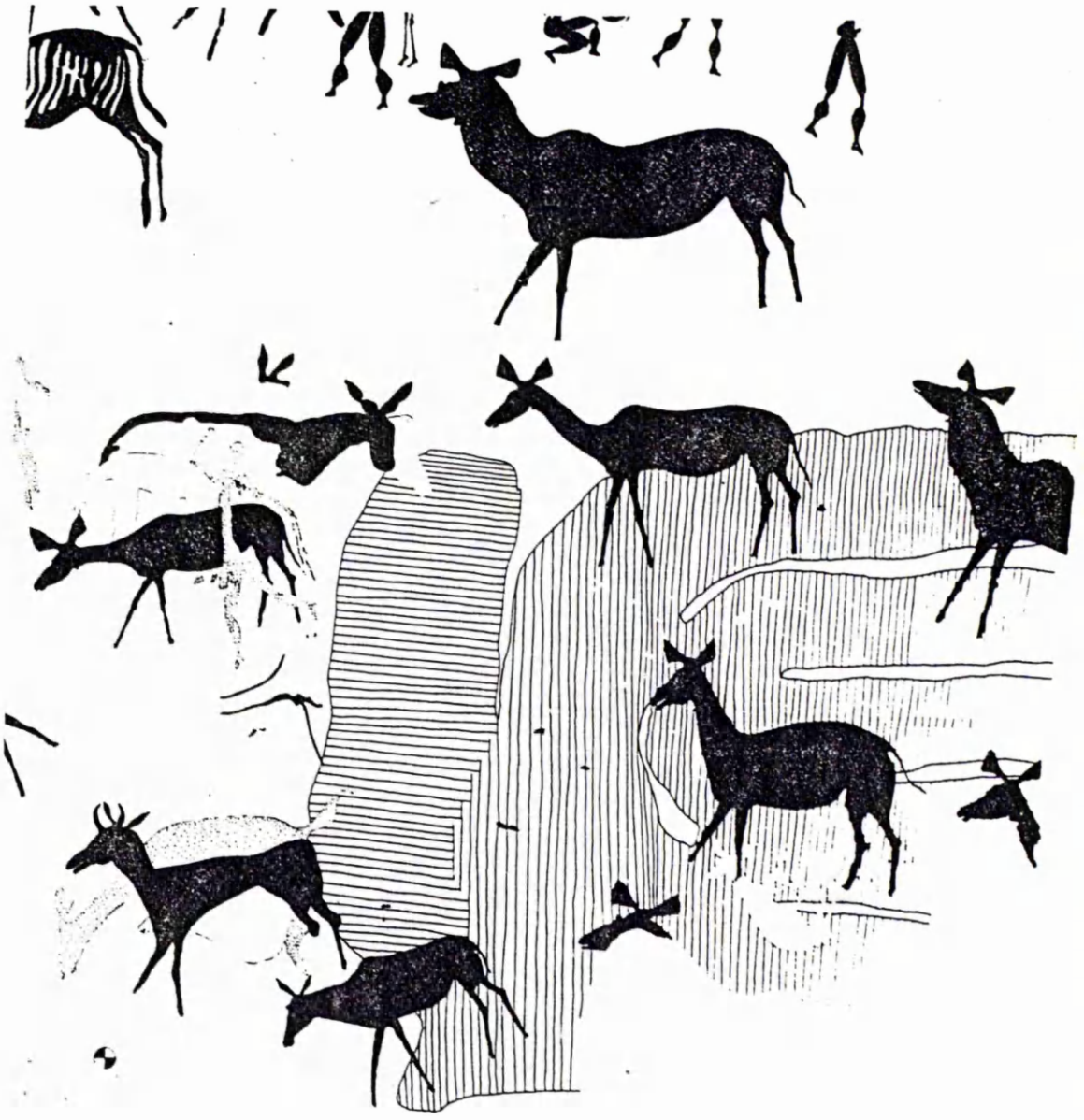
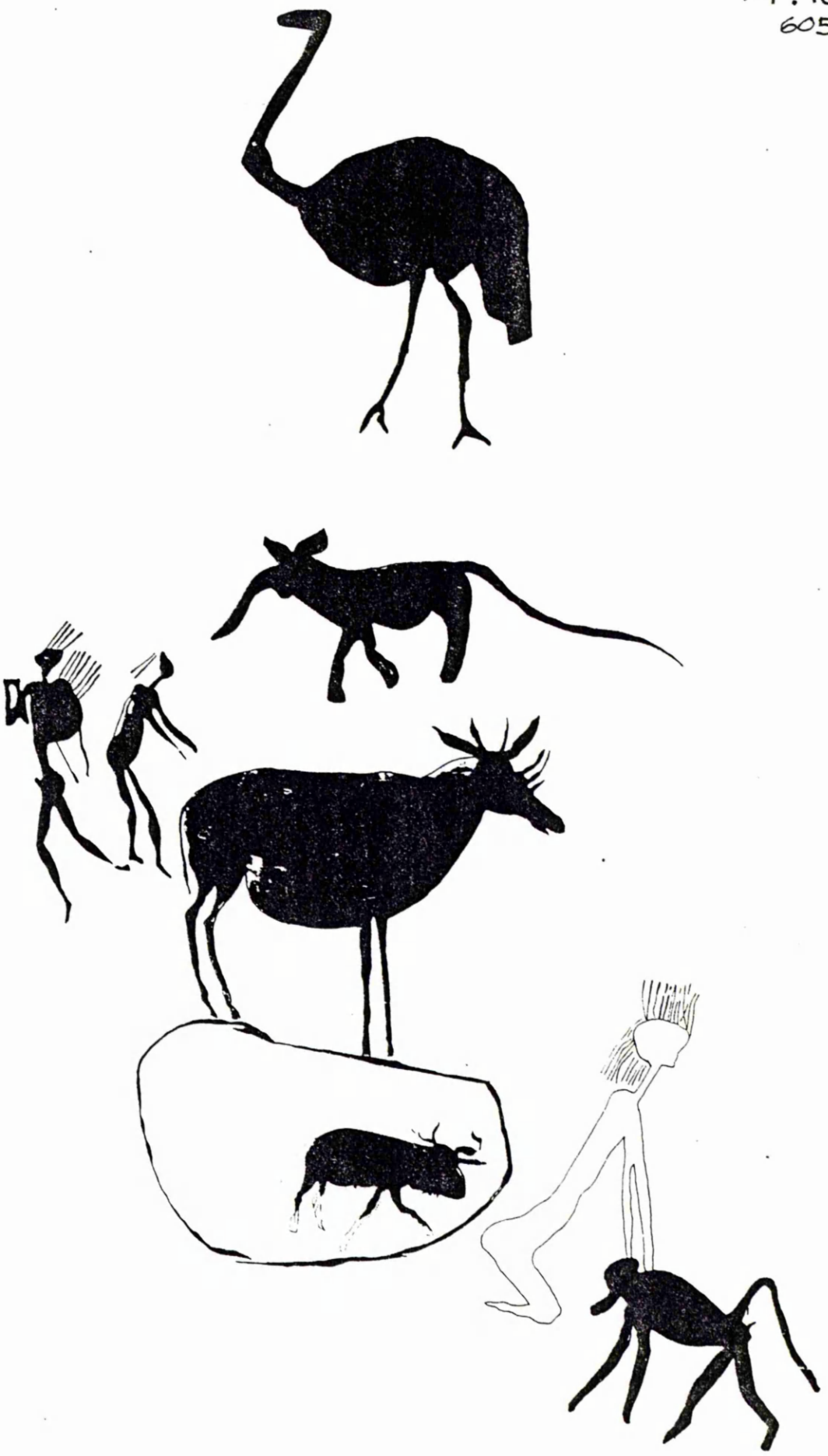


14.16
605



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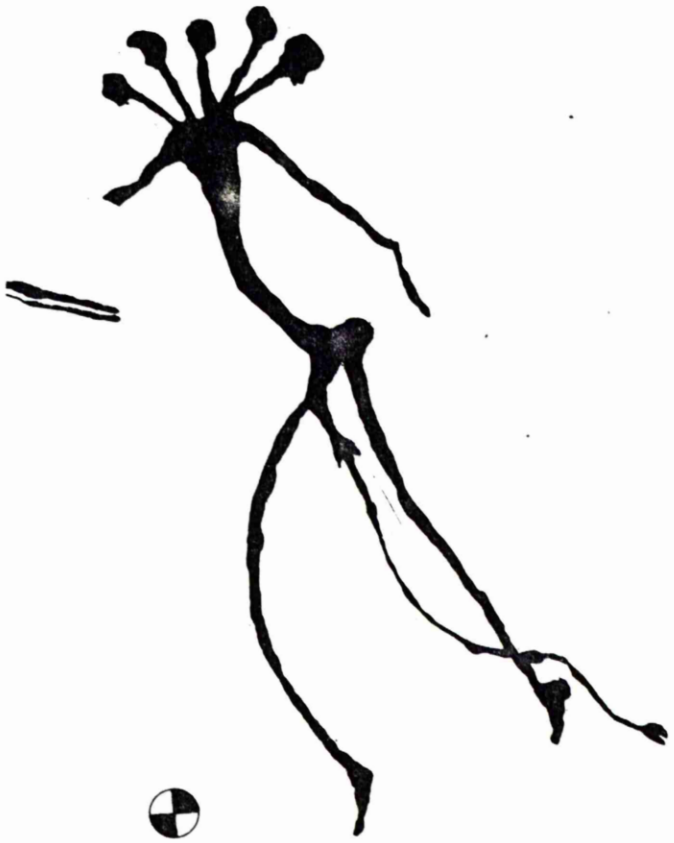
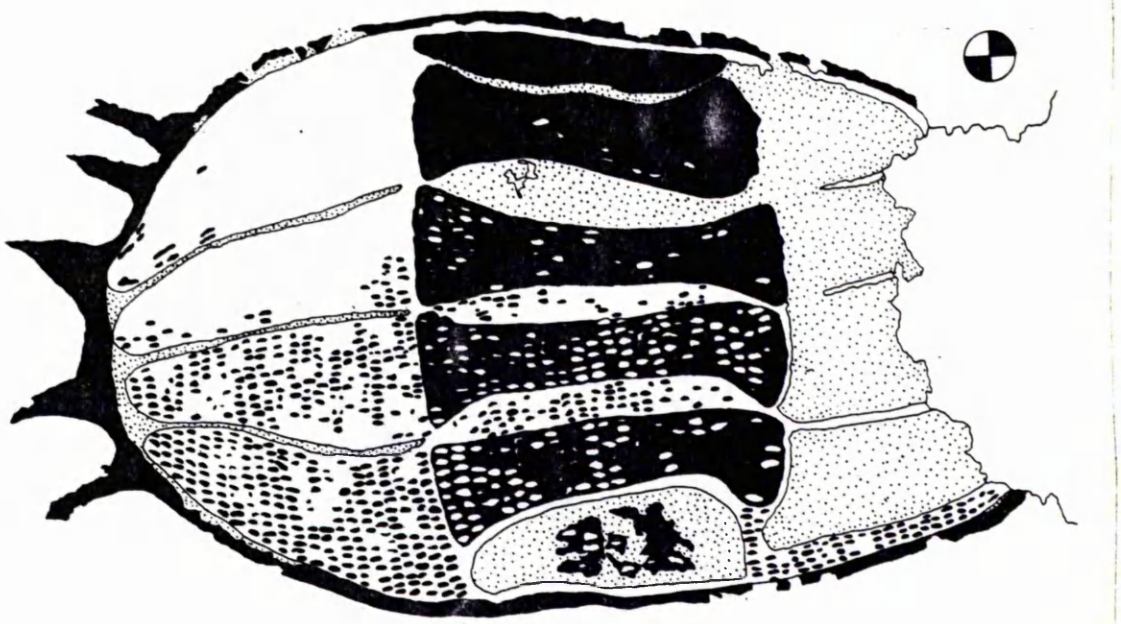
606





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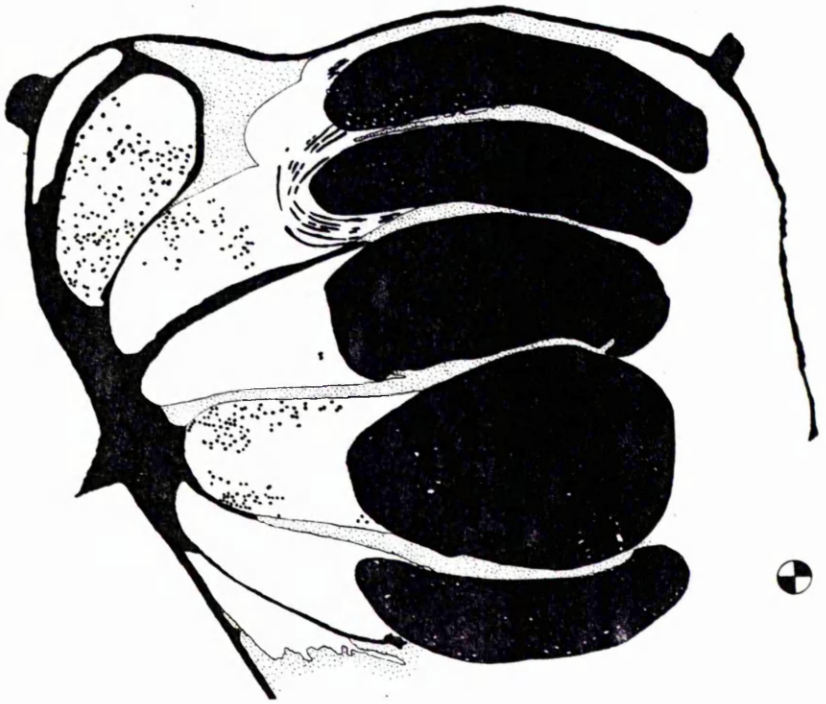

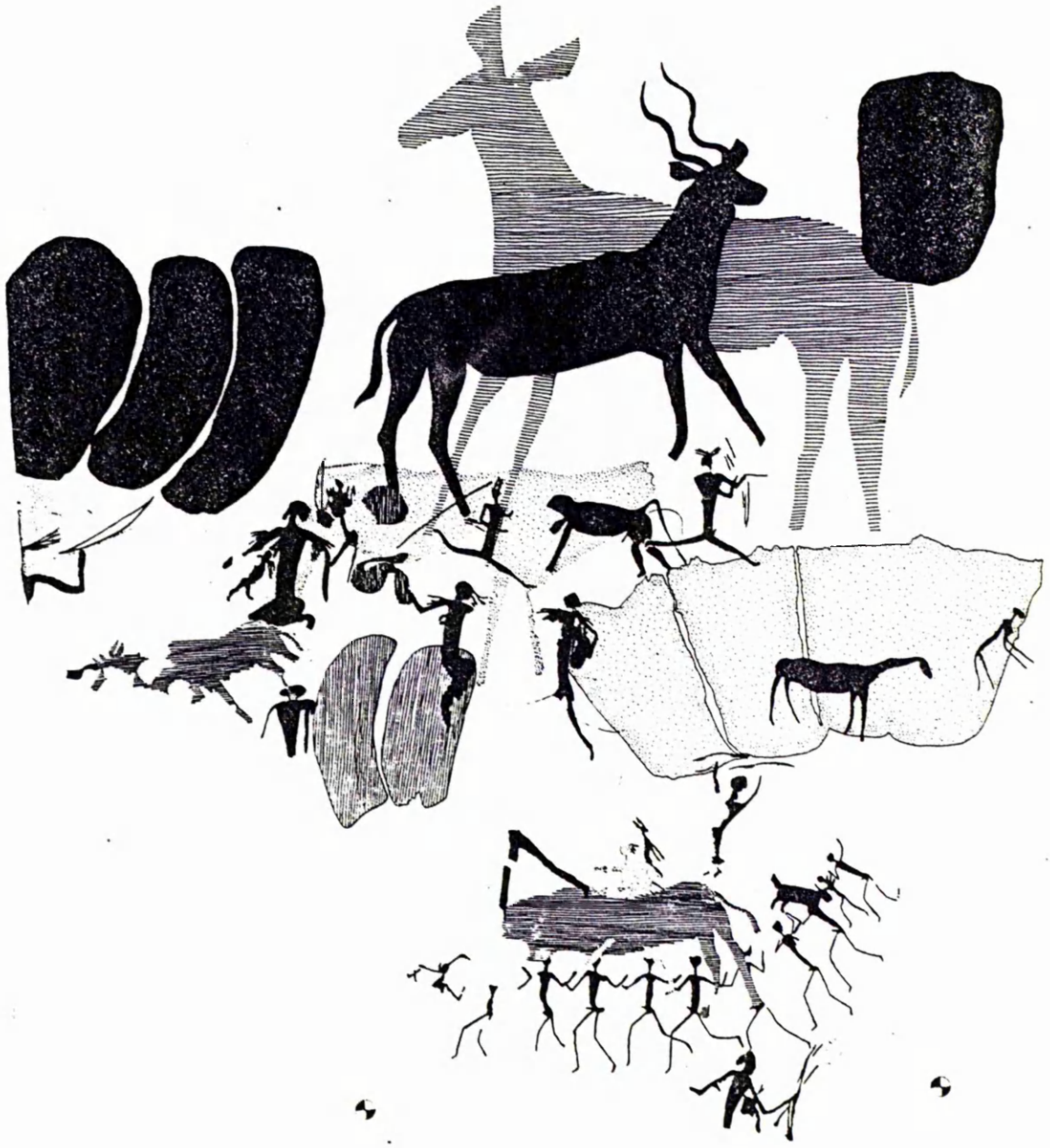

15. 5-7,9
610

5

9

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7

15. 10, 11

612

11

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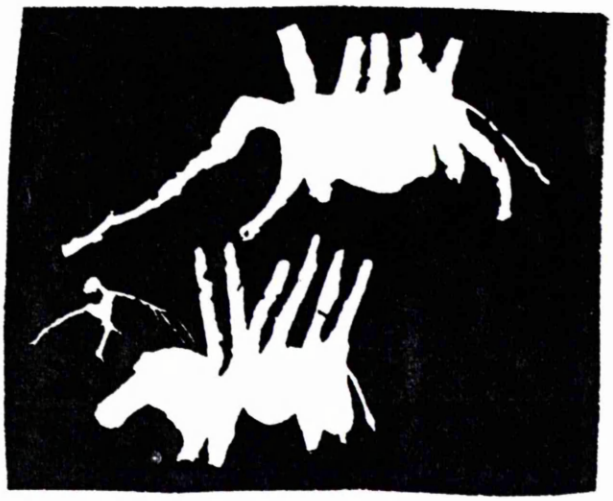
13

14



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15.17
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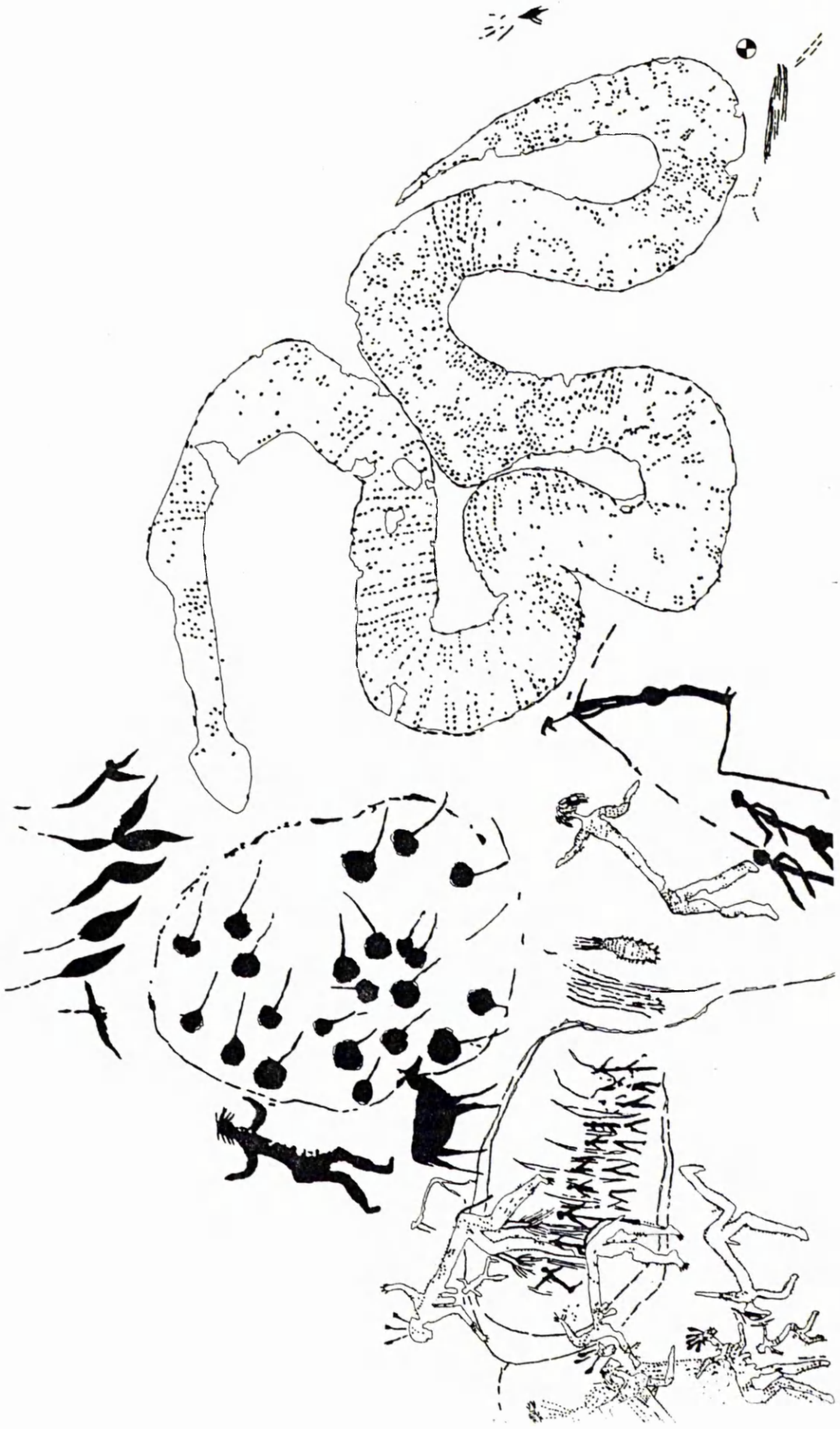

15. 18, 19
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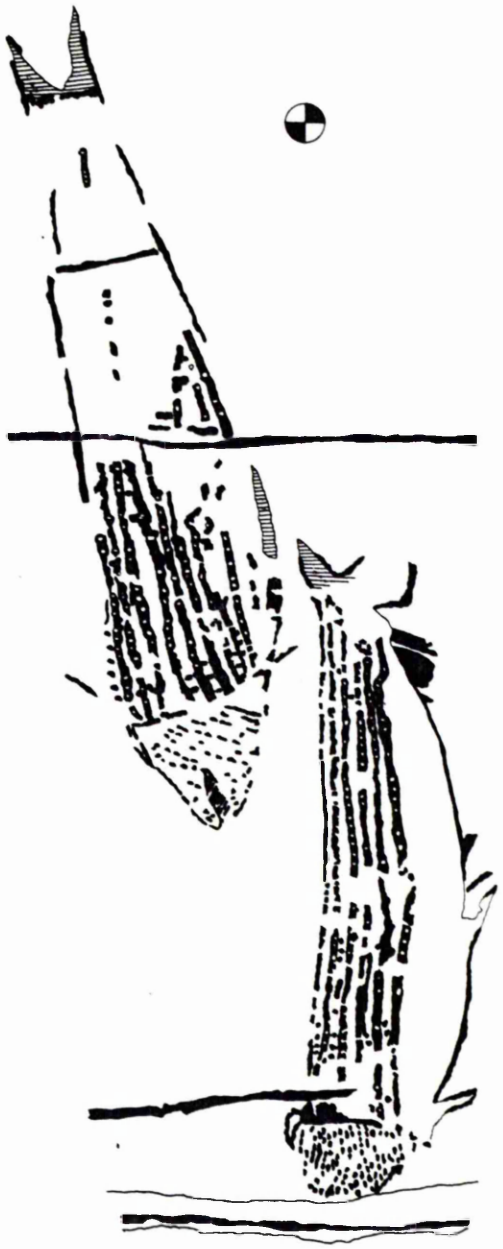
18

19



15.22
620

15. 23
621

15.24
622

15. 25, 27, 28
623

25

28

27